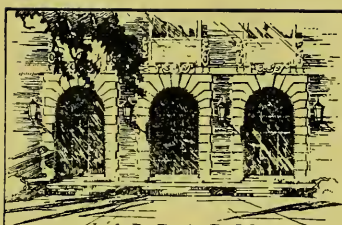


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ALMACK'S

A NOVEL.

“ Nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

THIRD EDITION.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.

1827.

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TO THAT MOST DISTINGUISHED AND DESPOTIC

CONCLAVE,

Composed of their High Mightinesses

THE LADIES PATRONESSES OF THE BALLS AT

ALMACK'S,

The Rulers of Fashion, the Arbiters of Taste,

The Leaders of Ton, and the Makers of Manners,

Whose sovereign sway over "the world" of London has
long been established on the firmest basis,

Whose Decrees are Laws, and from whose judgment
there is no appeal;

To these important Personages, all and severally,

Who have formed, or who do form, any part of that

ADMINISTRATION,

USUALLY DENOMINATED

THE WILLIS COALITION CABAL,

Whether Members of the Committee of Supply,

or

CABINET COUNSELLORS,

Holding seats at the Board of Control,

THE FOLLOWING PAGES,

Are with all due respect, humbly dedicated by

AN OLD SUBSCRIBER.

A 3

Ms. A. 2. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

PREFACE.

“To expose the vices of fashionable life, in their original and proudest sphere, is not only to purify the stream at its source, but to counteract their pernicious influence where it is the most formidable and extensive.”

Edinburgh Review.

THIS passage is presented to the reader as the only excuse that can be properly offered for obtruding the following Work upon the notice of the public.

It was originally commenced with no other intention, than that of amusing a family party

in the country, with recollections of the various scenes of dissipation which the preceding winter had supplied.

Some of the fashionable foibles of the day were gently hinted at; and among others, that decided preference for every thing foreign, which is at present so very prevalent, could not but be considered a fair subject for good-natured ridicule. At length it was presumed to enter upon the proud field of ALMACK's, where so irresistible a fund of folly was discovered, that it was impossible to resist the temptation of drawing forth some of the riches of so invaluable a store. It was even supposed that a display of the manners and conversation of the very highest *ton*, might furnish matter both for instruction and amusement.

Instruction, by exemplifying the various disappointments to which those who possess

fashion, and those who pretend to it, are alike exposed.

Amusement, from the manner in which such disappointments might be illustrated. It is hoped that both these objects have been in some measure attained.

All personal allusion is positively disclaimed ; though it is not pretended to deny, that many of the follies described are taken from the life, as well as several of the anecdotes related.

To the Ladies Patronesses of Almack's, some apology seems due for the liberty taken, in presuming to introduce them in the course of these Volumes ; but public characters have been always considered to be public property, and it is only in their capacity of *avowed agents for various places of public amusement*, that they are here alluded to.

Nor is any slight presumed to be thrown

upon their self-created official situation ; it is only intended to point out a few abuses which have crept in, among the executive agents.

Few can yet have forgotten the attacks made upon an Administration composed of “ All the Talents.” Who then can wonder, if a cabinet, though distinguished by “ all the beauties,” should yet fail to please every body ?

On the other hand, these respected and most respectable ladies are fully entitled to a large portion of gratitude, from a polite and discerning public, for volunteering their services in so arduous an undertaking, and for sacrificing their “ time, talents, and personal influence,”* to the public weal, in so disinterested a manner.

The only reward they seem hitherto to have obtained, is the general censure of all parties ; and numbers, who profit weekly by their bene-

* Pitt’s Speeches.

fits, are yet unjust enough to be loud in abuse of these fashionable monopolists.

Ill-fated ladies ! well may ye exclaim with the hero of ancient Rome, “ *O ingrata patria !*”*

* The dying exclamation of Scipio Africanus, when he ordered his bones to be kept at Liternum, and not conveyed to Rome. “ *Ingrata Patria ne quidem ossa mea habebis.*”

“ No ! no ! sir, what Shakspeare says of actors, may be better applied to the purpose of plays—they ought to be the ‘ abstract and chronicle of the times.’ Therefore when the history of our own age furnishes a case in point, if an author knows his own interest, he will take advantage of it.”

CRITIC.

“ So, sir, I call my novel “ ALMACK’S,” and have laid the catastrophe in Willis’s Rooms.”

AUTHOR.

ALMACK'S.

CHAPTER I.

ATHERFORD ABBEY.

Voyons nos personnages !

THE beauty of a fine spring morning induced Colonel Montague to prefer making his way to Bishop's-Court on foot, where he had, for some days previously, given its amiable possessors, the Mildmay family, reason to expect his presence. On his way thither he determined to go through the grounds of Atherford Abbey, the venerable seat of his ancestors, that he might spend a melancholy hour in surveying the

much-loved spot, where his happy childhood had been passed.

The last time he had trod that road, how different had been his feelings ! Ten years had now passed away, since, with the gay spirits of sixteen, he had taken leave of his family to join the Guards and embark for Spain. How bright had been his hopes—how fair a prospect did fortune then present to him !—He remembered well that the only tears he had shed were excited by the idea that his mother appeared in delicate health ; but her spirits were so cheerful, and her complexion so blooming, that it was impossible to think her very ill, and at the last he had bade her adieu with a smile. His father had assisted him to mount the favourite old horse which was to convey him to Merton ; his elder brother and his pretty little sister had walked by his side to the bottom of the park.—Where were they all now ?—all gone ! His parents were both dead ; his brother was a dis-

graced exile in a foreign land ; his sister had lately married an Austrian grandee ; a great part of the property was sold ; and the old Abbey inhabited by strangers—for it was let for a term of years. What a sad reverse !

Such were the melancholy thoughts which overpowered the mind of Colonel Montague, as he walked for a mile or two along the turnpike road. He determined to avoid the principal entrance, and to go through the village of Atherford ; behind the church he remembered there was a very pretty path that led to a less frequented part of the park, and which had been formerly his favourite walk, on account of the beautiful view it afforded of the Abbey.

He passed through that village, unknown and unnoticed, where once every one would have hailed him with delight, for he had always been a general favourite.

The old-fashioned parsonage showed its grey front, half hid between two aged elms, and the ivy grew thicker than ever round the Gothic casements; the ancient yews, cut into various grotesque figures, now, as of old, attracted the notice of every passer-by to the nice-kept flower-beds: but who could tell if the venerable Dr. Askew yet survived his patron? Our hero feared to ask.

He paused for a moment to admire a row of neat little white cottages; they had belonged to old pensioners of his mother's. The creepers which had been trained round them were just beginning to throw out their first leaves, and the privet hedges were as nicely trimmed as ever: it was some comfort to see that there was no appearance of distress. Upon a little green at the end of the village, stood the school-house; a tribe of healthy children were seen issuing from the porch, intent on their various amusements. The smart little inn next attracted

his notice : the old sign of the Montague Arms appeared to have been newly painted. The shop of all wares was next the inn ; its gossiping mistress stood at the door, on the watch for customers ; she dropped a low curtsy to the traveller as he passed. He recognized in her time-worn face an old servant of his family ; but she gazed for some time at him, unconscious of ever having seen him before. As he turned into the church-yard, he had to pass by the blacksmith's shop ; and close to the forge sat, on an old stone seat, a lame beggar ; his crutches lay on the ground beside him, but were guarded by a faithful little dog. This had been the poor fellow's resting-place for many a long year : Lionel remembered him well, and threw a half-crown into his hat as he passed.

“ God bless you, Sir, God bless you !” cried the beggar, “ such 'luck has not often visited me since the Montagues' golden days.”

Lionel was so much affected by this little

incident, that he dared not trust himself to speak, but hastened to cross the church-yard.

The church was a pretty small building, but much of its beauty was owing to a remarkably large picturesque old ash-tree, whose branches half-covered the tower.

“What is become of the yew hedge, which used to lead to the church-yard from the Abbey-lane?” said Colonel Montague to a countryman who was passing by.

“All cut down, Sir, by my Lady Birmingham’s orders, and these here new green rails put up instead;—all the country cried shame on her. Ah! if old Sir Walter Montague had been alive, it would never have been.”

“What a pity!” said Colonel Montague, who now turned into what was called the Abbey-lane: it opened into the park, and he was struck with the sight of a very pretty rustic gate, which terminated the lane.

“Pray, is not this gate new?” said he to a

farmer, who was passing through at the same time.

“ Oh dear no, Sir! it has been here this five years at least ; the last thing poor Sir Walter did, before he left the place, was to put up this here new gate : it was a fancy of my Lady's, they said ; God bless her memory, and his too ! we shall never see their like again.”

“ Does the old gamekeeper, James Wells, still live at the West lodge ?”

“ Oh, no ! Sir, he's dead long ago, and his wife too ; and the new people have brought fresh servants along with them. There's hardly any body left at the Abbey that was there in Sir Walter's time, but old Isaac, the gardener, and his wife.”

It was some consolation to Colonel Montague to think that he should at least find one who would recollect him at the Abbey ; and he proceeded on his melancholy way.

The green path he had chosen led him to a

fine plantation; the road passed through the middle of it, and the ground rose on either side to a considerable height. Laurels, and different kinds of evergreens, were planted in the foreground, and contrasted their lighter green with the sombre hue of a wood of Scotch firs, which extended for a long way, and ended in a steep descent; at the bottom of which the road turned abruptly, and, emerging from the gloomy shade of the wood of firs, our traveller burst at once on a view which, for its various beauties, could hardly be equalled.

Before him flowed the river Ather, a beautiful stream, which meandered through the park; the town of Merton, with its ancient minster and very handsome bridge, terminated the view to the right; the left was bounded by a ridge of grey hills.

On the opposite bank of the river, upon a gentle ascent, the ancient Abbey of Atherford

displayed its ivied towers and mullioned windows; it was almost embowered in wood, and the effect of the thick grove of ancient oaks which rose behind the building, was extremely fine.

Not a sound was heard, but now and then the gentle rippling of the water; and here and there a group of deer were seen at times darting from the wood across the park. Montague stood for some minutes fixed to the spot, lost in recollection,—he thought of his father, of all that was past, and sighed deeply. Some one coming along the road, whistling, disturbed his meditations; it was a farmer's boy, followed by a very handsome dog: he crossed the road close by him, and made his way along the grass to a little foot bridge, which was concealed from view by a fine old willow. Lionel recollected that it would be his nearest way, and followed the boy: he came up to him as he was driving

off a group of fine cows. "Pray, friend," said he, "can I get this way to the back-yard of the Abbey?"

"Sure you can, Sir; I am going that way myself with these here cows, to have 'em ready again milking-time, or Nanny Dairy will be in a stew."

"What a fine dog that is!" said Lionel; "it is one of the old Abbey breed, isn't it?"

"Ay, that it is, Sir; it was Sir Walter's old favourite;—poor Pouts!" said the boy, stroking him. "When the family went of for France, old Isaac, the gardener, begged him for a keepsake. I boards at Isaac's, and the beast, quite nat'ral like, always follows me when I comes to fetch the cows a-milking."

"Is Isaac Smith likely to be at home now?"

"Oh, yes, Sir, as likely as not; if your honour will look in the back-yard, or stable court, you'll find him cracking off some of his jokes, I

warrant ye ; he's quite the king among the folks at the Abbey."

Montague accompanied the boy till they came to the farm-yard gate, where he told him he would wait till old Isaac came out to speak to him. The boy, followed by Pouts, whistled in his cows ; while Lionel wandered about the well-known place in quest of a favourite peep at Atherford Church, which had been well managed by thinning the branches of two old oaks. The distant view of the pretty little tower had a very happy effect. At a short distance he spied a purple beech tree, which he well remembered planting just before he first went to Westminster.

It seemed but yesterday that he was standing by the gardener, and putting the little plant into the ground, yet it was now a tall and flourishing tree. He stood for some minutes moralizing upon the rapid march of time, when some one tapped him on the shoulder, and a well-known voice addressed him with—

“ I say, Sir, did you want to speak to me ? ”

Lionel turned his head, and perceived old Isaac's ruddy, weather-beaten face fixed on him in immovable surprise : the old man wondered what such a fine gentleman could have to say to him, though he had, at the same time, a kind of suspicion that it was some one he ought to know.

“ Ah, Isaac ! is it you, my good old fellow ? It is so long since I have seen you, that I fear you must quite have forgotten me.”

“ Why, Sir, I am puzzled for certain, and yet I think I should know you. Why sure it can't be ! ”—here the old man took a second glance at him—“ Yes, but it is though. Ah ! Sir, I know you now, for all you're grown so stout, and so much darker ; I thought it must be Master Lionel.”

“ Yes, my honest Isaac, it is indeed : I am only lately returned to England ; I am going now to Mr. Mildmay's, at Bishop's-Court, for a

few days, and I could not be so near the old Abbey, and not cast one sad look at it."

"Ay," said old Isaac, brushing off a tear from his furrowed cheek, "I can believe it makes you sad, Sir, to think of all that is past since you was here: but cheer up, Sir, and be of good heart, you're no ways to blame for any thing that has happened."

Here the old man's loquacity got the better of him, and he ran into his ordinary strain of reflection, on the contrast between the past and present possessors of the Abbey: which Lionel at length found an opportunity of interrupting, by inquiring if the family were then at home?

"No, Sir, there's nobody at home to-day; Sir Benjamin is gone to Liverpool, on some particular business; and my Lady and Miss Birmingham are just gone to Norbury, to stay all night with the grand folks there."

Colonel Montague asked if he could see the house.

To be sure he could ; his wife, old Molly, was still head house-maid. “ And sure, Master Lionel,” said the old man, “ you’ll let her have a peep at you : why she’d never recover it, if she was to hear that you’d been at the Abbey, and she not see you.”

Isaac led the way to the pleasure-grounds, where every change was pointed out and criticized. The turning the green-house into a conservatory was a terrible offence ; the altering the form of the flower-beds and destroying the box border was dreadful ; but the cutting down a group of old cypress trees, and the removing an old hour-glass, which had stood under them time out of mind, was what he never could nor would forgive.

In process of time, but it was no short operation, our hero was ushered into the ancient mansion, and old Molly was summoned to do the honours to her young master. She recognized him instantly, and no words can describe

the rapture she expressed at the sight of her old favourite. She had lived at the Abbey ever since he was born, and she had always, she boasted, pronounced him to be the flower of the family.

Lionel expressed a wish to go through the principal rooms ; and the two old servants led the way.

As they passed the Gothic hall, our hero gazed with a sort of melancholy pride on the numerous coats of arms which covered the walls, belonging to different families with whom the Montagues had been of old connected. The fine old oak staircase, richly carved, struck him as more beautiful than it had ever done before ; but on entering the saloon, the sight of his mother's picture, a very striking resemblance, by Opie, quite unmanned him. As he gazed upon her interesting countenance, he mentally thanked a kind Providence, which had removed her to a better world before those misfortunes had

befallen the family, which terminated in their leaving England.

A fine bust of Sir Walter, which was placed in a niche opposite, drew forth many exclamations of affection from the honest domestics, but Lionel's heart was too full for utterance. There were some excellent pictures in the room, but neither Holbein nor Vandyck could draw his attention from these mementos of his beloved parents. In vain did his two cicerones endeavour to fix his observation on various portraits of his ancestors; he heard not all their remarks upon the trifling resemblance between his brother Sir Edmund, and the great Admiral Montague; his thoughts were not his own. At length forcing himself away, he burst into the next room, which had formerly been his mother's dressing-room. Here all stood just as it used to do: the harp and piano-forte both open, as if some one had lately been playing on them; the old chintz arm chair turned to the fire, just

as it had stood when his mother rose from it, the last time he saw her, to bid him adieu; nay, the very screen, on which when a boy he had pasted caricatures, still retained its place in the corner. As he advanced to the middle of the room, gazing around him in silence, his attention was excited by the sight of an easel, on which was placed an unfinished picture: he could not mistake it, for it was the copy of his mother's portrait, which had affected him so deeply only just before.

“Whose painting is that?” said he to the two old servants.

“Oh, that is our young lady's doing, Sir; this is her morning room; this is where Miss Birmingham plays the music, and paints the pictures. The ladies has only been gone about an hour to Lord Norbury's, where they be to stay all night.”

“Ay, it is a pity she ben't at home, Sir,” cried old Molly, “for she's a nice young lady,

and so respects the old family, and all that belongs to 'em."

The library and dining-room were soon visited. Isaac insisted on his young master, as he always called him, taking particular notice of his own picture when a boy: he was caressing his favourite dog Neptune, and his little pony, Dick, was represented in the back-ground—"Poor Dick, he was sent to 'Squire Mildmay's, when the family went abroad; and the good old gentleman never let any body mount him but himself; but he died of old age, this last winter."

Montague would now have taken leave of the faithful pair, but as he crossed the hall, the sight of the old cloisters reminded him of the ancient Church, from whence the mansion took the appellation of Abbey. He could not refrain from taking one look at it.

Atherford Abbey had been a religious house, of considerable importance, before the Refor-

mation: the lands pertaining to it had been granted by Henry VIII. to the Montague family, and the whole of the monastic buildings were then destroyed, except the beautiful Abbey-church, in which service continued to be performed till the time of the civil wars, when it was dismantled by Oliver Cromwell's soldiers: and in the reign of Charles II. a grant had been obtained from Parliament to build a Church in the Village of Atherford, about a mile from the Abbey. The Montague family had, however, repaired the Abbey at their own expense, so that service was constantly performed there till about the beginning of the reign of George I.: from that time the old church was seldom used, except upon great occasions, such as the visits of any of the Royal Family, or any other solemn occasion. During the march of the Pretender, in 1745, from Carlisle to Derby, prayers had been offered up for his success in the ancient Abbey-church; but that was the last

time that divine service had been fully performed there, though it was still usual for marriages and funerals to be celebrated at it, as the mother-church. This ancient edifice was entirely covered with ivy, and the old towers had a most picturesque effect, peeping over the more modern mansion-house, which was built in the reign of Elizabeth. The cloisters were extremely fine, and were seen to great advantage from some of the living rooms.

The inside of the Church was now quite bare. There was at one end a superb painted glass window, and round the walls were some very fine monuments of most of the old families in the country:—those of the Montagues were of course pre-eminent. A plain marble-slab marked the resting-place where lay Sir Walter and Lady Montague; and a simple inscription told the passer by who they were that lay below.

Colonel Montague was much overcome; the

servants, with a degree of delicacy which could hardly have been expected from them, withdrew into a corner that they might not intrude upon his grief.

He was roused by the sound of the Abbey clock, and, recollecting that he had still some way to go, and that his old friend, Mr. Mildmay, did not keep late hours, he forced himself away from scenes to him so full of interest, and, after taking an affectionate leave of the two old servants, and giving them ample cause to remember his generosity, he turned through the park to the road which led to Bishop's-Court.

“There goes a flower of a youth,” said Isaac to his ancient spouse; “he'll make a figure wherever he goes, my life on it, and my blessing go with him.”

“Amen,” said old Molly, wiping her eyes upon her blue checked apron.

Colonel Montague had indeed been the flower of his family, as he had, since the death of Lady

Montague, been its stay; for that event, having completely overthrown his poor father, Sir Walter, left the affairs of the family at the mercy of an unprincipled steward, whose designs, together with the extravagance of the elder son, Edmund, gave rise to difficulties which nothing but a foreign residence could permanently retrieve, and which doubtless tended to hasten the termination of Sir Walter's valuable life. It was during this stay at Paris, that Colonel Montague's friend, the Baron de Wallestein, had sought and obtained the hand of Miss Montague, between whom and Lionel, Lady Montague had divided her fortune; Edmund, the eldest, having filled up the measure of his absurdities, by a disgraceful marriage with a beautiful but intriguing opera-dancer, in Italy.

CHAPTER II.

BISHOP'S-COURT AND ITS INHABITANTS.

“Sir, there is no character I esteem so highly as an English country gentleman of the old stamp.”

Strawberry Hill Anecdotes.

AFTER a walk of about three miles, Colonel Montague reached Bishop's-Court, the venerable mansion of Reginald Mildmay, Esq. In Catholic times, this place had been a lesser religious house, to Atherford Abbey, and, having frequently been the residence of the priors of Merton, it had been in those days commonly denominated the Priory Court; but in the reign of Henry VIII., it became part of the grant to the Montagues, who were much fa-

voured by that monarch, and one of the family afterwards rose to be bishop of it. He beautified and enlarged this ancient edifice, and changed its name to Bishop's-Court. The Mildmays, a family of considerable importance in the county of H——, and of a very ancient race, had purchased this property from the Montagues soon after the Revolution, at which period Sir Walter's ancestor had considerably impoverished himself, by the supplies he from time to time transmitted to the abdicated monarch. Bishop's-Court was a very curious gable-ended house, built of a sort of grey stone, and very richly ornamented. It had Gothic windows, and an ancient porch of entrance, which led into a quadrangular court, arched round. Under the porch were niches, in which, in Catholic times, there had been figures.

The house was surrounded with Scotch firs; it stood low, closed in on every side by steep round hills, which gave it a very singular ap-

pearance. The river Ather meandered at the foot of these green hills, and the banks above, on the opposite side, were steep and picturesque.

Montague was again completely at home, for here he had been accustomed, when a boy, to spend part of his holidays every year, and fishing in the river had then been one of his favourite amusements.

The hall was a low, irregular room, decorated with deer's antlers, and stuffed birds and beasts of various kinds. A fine American blood-hound lay upon a thick rug before the fire: Lionel remembered his sister's writing him word of its being sent from America by a younger son of Mr. Mildmay, who had afterwards been killed at the attack upon New Orleans. Cæsar started up to welcome the stranger, and frolicked before him into the drawing-room.

Like the hall, this was also a low, spacious room, but had a most comfortable appearance. Thick scarlet cloth curtains relieved the sombre

hue of oak wainscoting; two very handsome japan cabinets were the chief ornaments; but at one end hung a magnificent picture, a hunting piece by Sneyders. The favourite pursuits of the master of the house might be easily guessed, for the passages were covered with prints relating to field sports, interspersed with here and there a picture of a favourite dog.

Musical instruments, and ladies' work, seemed to indicate that female inhabitants were not wanting at Bishop's-Court; and Lionel seated himself at a table covered with newspapers, reviews, and French novels. He was revolving in his mind how many years had passed away since he had occupied the same old-fashioned, high-backed arm-chair, and listened to the good squire's fox-hunting anecdotes.

He was roused from his reverie by the entrance of Mr. Mildmay, a fine-looking, hale man of sixty, a complete country gentleman of

the old school, whose manners were polished, yet without fashion, and his taste simple, though without rudeness. He was attended by a fine spaniel, who seemed to be a privileged favourite.

“Ha ! Lionel, my boy, is it you? how rejoiced I am to see you !” and the kind old gentleman almost shook his hand off. “A hearty welcome to you to Bishop’s-Court. Now let’s look at you:—God bless me ! is it possible you can be the curly-pated boy I have carried so often on my back? Let’s see, how long is it since I have seen you?—ten years, I declare, next month, since you first put on your red coat ! What a change, to be sure ; what a stout, fine man you are grown,—and a Lieutenant-colonel already, and not yet seven-and-twenty ; there’s luck for you ! or rather merit, I should say. You were always a steady, good fellow, so I have told your poor father many a time ; but he was so fond of that jackanapes of a bro-

ther of your's:—pray, where may he and his well-matched lady be, at present?"

"The last time I heard, Sir, they were at Naples."

"Well, well, let them stay there and welcome. Plenty of sharpers and knaves of every description, among the English on the Continent already—one or two more or less won't signify. But to think of any one bearing the name of Montague so disgracing himself and his family,—it makes my blood boil again. Pray what family has he?"

"Only one little girl, Sir."

"What, no son as yet; well, pray heaven he never may have one, and it will be all the better for you, my dear boy."

"Oh! spare me this subject, I entreat you, Sir," said Lionel.

"When I look at you," pursued the old gentleman, "I know your features again, though you are so altered; your hazel eyes, just like

poor Sir Walter's, and that dimple on your cheek—well, it does my heart good to see you again. Which way did you come, pray?"

"By Weldon Regis, Sir, but I stayed an hour or two at the Abbey."

"Ay, I guessed you would; and very right too, though I dare say it made you very melancholy: why it makes me so whenever I go that way, and to you it must have been a heart-rending business. Well, you would find every thing in excellent order, for I must say, the Birminghams are capital tenants, and take as much pride in the place as if it were their own: in that respect you are well off. I must introduce you to them: they are among our best neighbours, and we are on excellent terms. They have their little peculiarities, but, on the whole, we go on vastly well; and it is a great thing to have let the Abbey to people who are both able and willing to improve the place."

“Are Sir Benjamin and Lady Birmingham agreeable people, Sir?” said Lionel.

“Why, as to that, there may perhaps be two opinions. They are mortal rich people, from the neighbourhood of Liverpool. No great pedigree between them: my lady brought a considerable part of the property, and so she is, as may be expected, a little purse-proud or so, too fond of pomp and show—rather over-rates the power of wealth. Sir Benny will do no one any harm, poor man: but there’s one of the family I will defy any body to say a word against, and that is their daughter: a sweet girl she is. She’s the sworn friend of my two girls.”

“I beg the young ladies’ pardon for not inquiring after them before; I hope they are quite well, Sir?”

“Oh, you will see them both at dinner, in high spirits. They have been most impatient for your arrival, I can assure you. Poor Julia

had a sad dull time while her sister was at Paris, for I was constantly laid up with the rheumatism ; but she made me a famous nurse : however, I do not mean her to be so confined again. I have now got my sister Pen to live with me, which will give the girls more liberty, I hope. You must remember Mrs. Penelope Mildmay : she used to live at the bow-windowed white house, at Merton, on the right-hand side, opposite St. Nicholas's Church. I dare say, when a boy, you have often eat some of her queen-cakes ; for I remember old Dinah, her maid, was famous for queen-cakes. But I have now got the whole establishment—sister Pen, old Dinah, and their tortoise-shell cat,” said the old gentleman, laughing, “an addition of three tabbies to my family ; I trust too that they are all as well off as that one,” pointing to a very beautiful cat, which lay in great state upon a cushion before the fire. “But, really,” continued Mr. Mildmay, “I find sister Pen a very valuable acquisition :

she's a good-hearted old soul. She makes my flannel waistcoats: knits my worsted stockings for the winter; quacks all the poor people; overlooks the servants; and amuses old Dr. Askew of an evening with backgammon, or, if we are enough, she is ready to take a hand at whist. Poor Askew! how sorry he will be not to see you, Lionel; but he has been obliged to winter at Bath for his health: he has lost his teeth very much lately, so that I find some difficulty in understanding him, when he begins one of his long stories."

"But you have not named Miss Louisa, Sir," said Montague; "I hope she is at home."

"Oh, I forgot that you and Louisa are very great friends: she is quite well, and as gay and as Frenchified as ever. I suppose you saw her constantly at Paris."

"Yes, Sir," said Montague; "I saw her almost every day at my sister's."

"What, at my little god-daughter Caro-

line's? And so she is married to one of your foreigners, and my old friend Sir Walter liked it. Well now, that is one of the things I cannot comprehend! Baron de—— what is his name?"

"The Baron de Wallestein, Sir. He is a most amiable man, I assure you, and I feel certain, when you know him, you will approve her choice, though he is a foreigner. He has very considerable landed property in his own country, and he has been lately named ambassador from Austria to this court: he and my sister were just arrived at Brunet's Hotel when I left London."

"This is good news, indeed," said Mr. Mildmay, "to find that Caroline (I never shall be able to call her *Madame la Baronne*) will not be entirely lost to her family and friends. I don't know whether it's her fault, or whose fault it is,—but this I do know, that my Louisa has never been pleased with any one thing since she left Paris last October. She does nothing but

compare this winter with the last; and then she crams us all day long with such fine accounts of Lady Elizabeth Stuart's parties, (no, *soirées* is the word, I remember,) and the Duke of Wellington's balls, and all the Princes, Dukes, Marquises, Counts, and Barons, besides the Cuirassiers, Chasseurs, Lanciers, Gardes du Corps, and Gardes Royales, with whom she has been used to figure away. It is really quite provoking to hear her rave about these same Whiskerandos; but, if your sister Caroline has married one of them, of course she must be even much worse."

"I will not pretend to answer that question, Sir," said Lionel, "till I have seen Miss Louisa; I believe the ladies in general are very partial to foreigners. We Englishmen do not say insinuating things with the same bewitching *tournure*."

"*Tournure*, indeed! now that's one of the words that's never out of Louisa's mouth. I

assure you I often regret having let her go abroad ; she was perfectly happy before, and I do not see that it is any advantage to learn to despise one's own country and country people ; it is buying a taste for dress, dancing, and the guitar, rather too dear. But, however, don't let us discuss this matter at present, for I hear so much about it, that I always grow out of humour whenever it is named. I fancy too, Mr. Lionel, that it's almost dressing-time—Yes ! there's the bell. I can tell you that your servant and portmanteau are come, for I saw your horses in the yard an hour ago. A nice black mare you've got : where did she come from ?”

“ It was one my poor father took with him to Paris, Sir ; he gave it me to ride down to Cambray upon, and it has carried me ever since.”

The gentlemen now separated for the important business of the toilette. When they met again, Lionel was introduced to Mrs. Penelope Mildmay, a nice-looking old lady, whose man-

ners were marked with a little of the precision said to belong to her tribe, but she was good-humoured, and very conversable.

So many years had passed away since Colonel Montague had seen Julia, the eldest Miss Mildmay, that she seemed like a new acquaintance to him. She was at this time about seven-and-twenty. Having early lost her mother, she had, almost from childhood, been accustomed to preside as mistress of her father's house; and this had given her a degree of gravity and reflection, which some might think misplaced at her age. She had also superintended the education of her sister, who was a most beautiful and accomplished girl, several years younger than herself. Miss Mildmay was not handsome, if regularity of features be required to constitute beauty, but she had a sweetness of countenance which could never fail to charm. The expression of her eyes bespoke sense and intelligence, and in her smile you could trace her gentle,

feeling disposition. Her's was, indeed, no common character : she had been taught, by the experience of her youth, to depend upon her own resources for amusement ; and being naturally of a very cheerful disposition, she required not the excitement of company to make her love home, for she knew how to render it agreeable both to herself and others : a better gift, perhaps, than any fortune can bestow,—*Se suffire à soi-même*. She derived constant pleasure from her various pursuits ; a ride, a walk, her garden, her pencil, nay, even her needle, would suffice at any time to afford her both occupation and interest ; yet she was in every respect qualified to be an ornament to society. Nothing could disturb the equanimity of Julia's temper : her father's little peculiarities—her aunt's prejudices—her sister's caprices—she listened to the complaints of each, without betraying one to the other, and might, indeed, be termed the general comforter.

The Frenchified Louisa was a very different

person : she was all brilliancy and animation ; she had eyes of the brightest blue, a most transparent complexion, and a profusion of the finest auburn ringlets : these charms, united to a most graceful person, had turned the heads of half Paris during the last two winters, which she had spent in that capital with her friend the Baroness de Wallestein. Louisa had now been returned a few months, but she was yet far from reconciled to the change ; Bishop's-Court appeared so dull, particularly in the winter, after all the gay society to which she had been accustomed. The H——shire squires were, in truth, such very different beings to the smart *militaires* on the other side of the water, that she might perhaps be excused for feeling a little regret at all the gaiety she had left ; be it remembered too, that she was not yet twenty. She had always been her father's darling, and he had indulged her in every whim ; she had very quick parts, and a considerable share of wit, but she could not live

without excitation of some kind or other. In society she was all life and gaiety ; but at home, and particularly since her visit to the Continent, she was often discontented and out of spirits. She had acquired a taste for higher society than she could easily meet with in the neighbourhood of Bishop's-Court. In Julia, however, she had the kindest of friends and advisers. That amiable sister felt anxious to trace the source of Louisa's frequent depression. Did it merely arise from want of amusement, or was there any other cause connected with it ? She suspected the latter, from observing that an epistle from Madame de Wallestein never failed to restore, in some degree, the gaiety of her smiles.

Since her return from Paris, Louisa had become quite the fashion in the county of H—— ; and even at Norbury, which was the great house of that part of the world, her foreign *tournure*, her guitar, her French romances, and Parisian fashions, made her considered in no common

light: she was pronounced, even by the Countess of Norbury herself—a most difficult and exclusive personage—to be a valuable acquisition to their set; and the style of company she met with in that house, seemed the only one that afforded her any amusement; for, as both Lord and Lady Norbury had a horror of natives, so most of their visitors came from town, and were generally persons of *ton* and consequence.

Mr. Mildmay had but one son, who was considerably older than Julia, and who had lately been called to the bar: he generally resided at home, and had a good deal of practice in that neighbourhood. He was an excellent young man, but he had not sufficiently attended to the Graces to please his sister Louisa; she thought he wanted *tournure*, and had *l'air très peu comme il faut*. Godfrey was intent upon his profession; and, careless of his external appearance, he sometimes ventured, presumptuous man! to indulge a joke at his fair sister's

refinements, and she was much offended at what she termed the impertinence of his criticisms. On all occasions he was a great comfort to his father, who, now in the decline of life, required Godfrey's advice and assistance in the management of his property. The Bishop's-Court estate was not large, but Mr. Mildmay was descended from so ancient a stock that he inherited a considerable degree of influence in the county, which the respectability of his character, and the benevolence of his disposition, had much increased; he was, therefore, very generally esteemed, and was certainly one of the most popular men in the county. Sir Walter Montague had been his nearest neighbour and intimate friend; and no one had exerted himself more effectually than the worthy squire of Bishop's-Court had done, to bring about some kind of settlement of the Atherford property, at the time when the unfortunate Baronet had been obliged to retire to France.

“ And so Caroline is really in London,” said Louisa to Colonel Montague, as they sat round the tea-table in the evening. “ It was such a surprise to me to hear of the Baron’s appointment to this country, that it seems even now like an agreeable dream to think that they are arrived so near us ; and how does she bear this horrid foggy atmosphere ? ”

“ Oh, perfectly well ! ” replied Lionel, laughing, “ you forget that it is her native land :—it is only six years since she first left England.”

“ And the dear Baron ? How does he support the change ? ”

“ Oh ! with great composure ! or I might say even pleasure. He likes every thing English ; and as he was brought up in this country, he is quite delighted to find himself once again among all his old friends ; what will you say when I tell you he calls himself *un veritable Rosbiff* ? ”

“ Oh, that ’s all very well for the Baron, quite diplomatic. It is his *métier*, you know, to adore whatever country his court sends him to ; but as for Caroline, I fancy I know her taste tolerably well, and I am sure she will not like England. How she will regret *le cher Feydeau ! et les Italiens !* where she used to go so constantly ; and then *les Tuileries*, and the *Champs Elysées !* ”

“ But you forget,” said Julia, “ that she will have Hyde-Park, and Kensington-Gardens.”

“ Oh, my dear sister, how can you be so cruel as to name them at the same time ? There are trees, to be sure, in both places, and a tree can be but a tree ; but for the men and women, heavens ! what a difference ! There *si éveillé, si bien mis*, with so much *tournure* : here such a *monotonie*, and, as my old singing-master, Pacini, used to say, ‘ *Avant tout il faut détruire la monotonie !* ’ Are they to be compared ? ” said

the fair orator, with an appealing look at Colonel Montague,—“ you, who know both, speak without national prejudice.”

“ If you mean to compare the trees in Hyde-park or Kensington-gardens, with those in the Tuileries, there certainly can be no doubt that the advantage is all in favour of the former ; if the men,—I think the English are a much finer, stouter race : and as for the fair sex, oh ! my dear countrywomen must ever gain by a comparison with the ladies of any other nation ;” and he bowed with much gallantry, first to Julia, then to Louisa.

“ There, niece,” said Mrs. Penelope, bridling up with dignity, “ now I hope you are satisfied.”

“ Not at all,” replied Louisa ; “ one thing I am sure you will allow, though,” said she, turning to Lionel ; “ that French women, of all classes, understand dress much better than the English.”

“ Do you remember what your great admirer, the Chevalier de Villemont used to say ?”

“ What, the tall Colonel of the *Premier Régiment des Cuirassiers*, with his immense mustachios ? I remember he used always to teaze me to death to *valse* with him : what did he say ?”

“ *Que les Anglaises ont plus de naturel, et les Françaises plus d'acquis.*” Caroline took him up immediately, “ *Reste à savoir, Monsieur le Chevalier,*” said she, “ *lequel vaut mieux.*”—He answered her, very quickly, “ *Pour moi, Madame, je désirerais surtout que ma femme eût du naturel.*”

“ Oh ! but the Chevalier de Villemont would say any thing to please a fair lady ; I dare say he would maintain that black was white, if it would gain him an invitation to a ball.”

“ But if the spirit of truth once moved him to say that white was white, I might believe him ; might not I ?”

“ Oh, I hate an argument ; I see you have

not got over your bad habit of disputing every point with me, so let us change the subject. Will Caroline remain long in London, do you think?"

"I should fancy not; I left them at Brunet's Hotel; but they had seen a house she thought would suit them, which had belonged to the late Spanish Ambassador, in Portland Place; it is a very convenient mansion, and well furnished; I dare say they will get into it immediately. But as the King is at Brighton, Walstein must go there to pay his court to his Majesty, and I should not wonder if Caroline were to accompany him: you know she loves change better than any thing. In that case, she will probably take the children with her, that they may have a little sea air during the next month."

"Think of my never asking after them! so fond as Gustavus used to be of dear Loo, as he always called me. Let me see, he is now just

three years old. Does Caroline still nurse my pretty god-daughter, that sweet little Ulrica?"

"Oh, dear no! you may be sure she got rid of that troublesome office before the winter balls began; I remember the Baron was very angry because the poor little girl was to be weaned, that mamma might dance at a great fête, which was given on New Year's Night, at the Hôtel de la Préfecture."

"Well! I think Caroline was quite right: I am sure she had led a stupid life long enough; nearly a year and a half since she had been to one ball! The whole of last winter she could go nowhere, from being then so near her confinement. Why you and the Baron would make quite a slave of her; and at her age too, it is so natural to love dancing and amusements. Why, after all, you know, she is but two-and-twenty; just three years older than I am."

"But is that any reason why she is to neglect her children?" inquired Julia with a smile.

"Now, that is such a true English idea!" replied her sister. "In France they understand these things so well, the children are never in the way as they are here, where they interfere with every amusement: a *mère de famille* there, is not the sort of domestic drudge she is with us humdrums: as that same Chevalier de Villemont observed one day, '*L'Angleterre c'est le pays des demoiselles, mais pour les femmes mariées, ce sont des véritables malheureuses.*'"

"Now you see how she goes on," said Mr. Mildmay; "ah! my sweet Louisa, you have picked up some strange odd notions in France, but you will soon grow English again, I hope."

"Oh, my dear papa, what an idea! however, there is no telling what rustication may not produce: and I assure you," turning towards Lionel, "if it were not for Caroline's delightful letters, and an occasional visit to Norbury, I should, by this time, have become a perfect Goth."

"Oh, then you have been at Norbury!" said

Colonel Montague, with some surprise; "What! lately?" and he fixed his eyes in a very scrutinizing manner upon her.

The effect of this glance upon the young lady was instantaneous, for she turned scarlet; her face, her neck, her arms, were all of the same glowing hue: she said something in reply to his question, which it was impossible for any one to hear, and then turned her head another way, to avoid his stedfast gaze.

"I was just going to ask you whether you had been at Norbury since your last letter to Caroline," continued he with much *sang-froid*, yet still keeping his eyes fixed upon her, "because she will expect you to have something very important to communicate in your next dispatch. I shall write to her to-morrow, if you have that to tell, which she will wish to hear."

"No, no, nothing," replied the young lady, in the greatest embarrassment, and she began

very deliberately to pour the tea into the cream-pot.

"I think," said Julia, laughing, as she touched her sister's hand, "you had better let me help you; suppose we order some fresh cream."

Poor Louisa smiled as she wiped away a starting tear, which she had in vain tried to check, and Julia, who felt for her distress, though ignorant of what had occasioned it, was thinking how she could best change the subject, when Mrs. Penelope, who had left the room some minutes before, re-entered with a small parcel, which she put before Louisa.

"There, niece! Colonel Montague's servant has brought this packet for you, from London."

"Oh, how delightful! Caroline's own handwriting, I see."

The parcel contained a quantity of the last invented patterns for *broderies*, a dozen new French romances for the guitar, a few *brochures politiques*, a *Roman des plus nouveaux dans le*

genre romantique, a bonnet à la jolie femme, a volume of new costumes, and last, though not least, a letter. Louisa pressed the dear epistle to her lips, and broke the perfumed green seal, on which was inscribed these words:—"Constante per la vita." "Ah," said she, "that is the seal poor little Alphonse de Rosenval gave Caroline. How is the Count?"

"You have been very ungrateful not to ask after him before," said Lionel, "such a warm admirer as he was of your's. You will be happy to hear, that he is named private secretary to the Baron; he is shortly to arrive, and he looks forward with much pleasure to seeing you again,—*cette charmante demoiselle Anglaise.*"

Another blush, but it was of a paler hue, again overspread the fair Louisa's lovely face; and to hide her very becoming confusion, she collected together the various articles of the Parisian packet, and with her unread epistle retired to

her own apartment. Two well-filled folio sheets! what happiness in perspective! Before, however, she could compose her fluttering spirits sufficiently to commence the perusal of this interesting manuscript, she gave way to a sudden burst of tears, which somewhat relieved her distress. "Cruel Lionel," said she to herself; "to allude so suddenly to what he knew must agitate me! what must Julia have thought of my tears? oh! I must unburthen my mind to her; but first let me read this letter."

While we leave her thus agreeably occupied, let us return to the drawing-room.

"So my little Louisa has left the room," said Mr. Mildmay, waking out of a comfortable nap, which he generally took after tea: "what has she gone away for? I must have some music presently."

"She is gone to read a long letter she has just received from Madame de Wallestein, Sir," said Julia.

“ Well then, till she comes back,” said the old gentleman, “ Sister Pen, you must give me my revenge at Backgammon ; I have not forgotten how you beat poor dear Dr. Askew yesterday ; he was quite angry, I assure you.”

The old pair were soon settled at their game ; Julia took up her work, and Lionel drew his chair close to her. “ Your pretty sister is a sad flirt, Miss Mildmay,” said he in a low voice. “ I often used the privilege of a very old friend to lecture her in Paris ; she made sad havoc with the gentlemen’s hearts, I assure you.”

“ But you seem to have escaped unhurt yourself,” said Miss Mildmay with a smile : “ you know ‘ He jests at scars, who never felt a wound.’ ”

“ The society in Paris is too brilliant for my taste,” continued he ; “ perhaps, also, I may have seen too much of it ; or else the unexpected change in my own prospects may very possibly have disposed me to gravity. But I own that I

often regret my sister Caroline's thirst for dissipation : at one time I had hoped she was growing domestic, but that was before your sister came to Paris."

" Both so young, so lively, and so much admired," said Julia, " there is great excuse to be made for them; and the Baroness's situation, of course, exposed her to much temptation of that kind."

" Ah!" said Lionel, " I remember you were always the most indulgent and good-natured person that ever lived, the kind excuser of every body's faults: when we were children, if I got into disgrace, I always used to say, Ah! Julia Mildmay will ask pardon for me, and nobody can resist her. Do you remember those happy days, when, during the holidays, I used to come here with the fish I had caught in the river? Alas, poor Atherford!"

" You came by the dear old Abbey to-day, did not you?"

“ Yes, and most melancholy it made me :— Do tell me, Miss Mildmay, what kind of people are these tenants of my brother’s—this Birmingham family ?”

“ Of Sir Benjamin and Lady Birmingham,” said Julia, “ perhaps the less I say the better : they are vulgar, odd people, immensely rich, and ridiculously purse-proud. There cannot be a more absurd woman than her Ladyship ; Sir Benjamin is a good sort of man, and very generous, but has never lived in society, and his appearance and manner are much against him.”

“ And they have one daughter ?”

“ Yes, a most delightful girl, with whom Louisa and I are extremely intimate. She was brought up by a sort of connection of ours, and therefore we have long been well acquainted : you must formerly often have heard my father mention his old friend Dr. Selwyn.”

“ What ! the late Vicar of Atherford ? Oh ! to be sure I have, frequently.”

“ Well, his son married a half-sister of Lady Birmingham's, who, by her father's side, was related to us, and this lady had the charge of Barbara Birmingham for several years, while her father and mother were in the West Indies. Mr. and Mrs. Selwyn are most amiable people ; he has the living of Derwent, in this neighbourhood ; of course, you may believe they have educated this young heiress in a very different manner to what she would have been at home.

“ She is now turned eighteen, a remarkably fine girl, yet without the smallest vanity or affectation. She is to be presented immediately after Easter, and as she will, in all probability, be one of the greatest heiresses in this country, you may imagine the ambitious plans which a very artful manœuvring mother is already forming in her active mind for the establishment of this her only child. Poor Barbara ! I hope you will see her, Colonel

Montague, for I am sure her's will be a character quite to charm you. Then, she perfectly adores the old Abbey, and is so good and charitable to all the poor people in the village. She has heard so much of the many virtues of your mother, that she has taken Lady Montague's character as a model: she keeps up all her schools and benevolent institutions, and wishes that every thing should continue just as it used to be at Atherford in former times."

"May God bless her for it!" said Lionel, with much feeling. "I have often thought, if ever there was an angel in this world, my beloved mother was one."

"The Birminghams are gone to Norbury to-day, but as they do not set off for town immediately, I hope we shall see them while you are with us. Barbara often calls here, to talk to us about her school or her poor people."

“ Is Lord George Fitzallan at Norbury ?”

“ Indeed I do not know.”

“ Has he ever been here to visit Mr. Mildmay ?”

“ I cannot say ; I am not aware that my father is acquainted with him. But why do you ask ?”

“ Because I fancied that, as he is Lady Norbury's nephew, he probably often visited in this neighbourhood ; and, as he is an old friend of mine, I should like to have seen him again. Pray where is Godfrey ?”

“ He is gone to the Quarter Sessions at Weldon Regis, and I fear he may not return to us till to-morrow : he will be most anxious to see you.”

“ Oh ! I long to shake him by the hand once again ; such kindness as he has often shown me ! He and your good father have indeed proved themselves the true and attached friends of my family, and I trust I shall never forget my

obligations to them : I hope Godfrey is getting on well in the law ?”

“ Indeed I believe he is. I hear from all sides how much he is looked up to, and he seems always full of business ; but he is the last person to mention his own success ; he has too much modesty.”

“ The usual attendants upon merit. I am not at all of the opinion of the fashionable lecturer, who said, that modesty and merit were only associated together, because they both began with an M.*”

Louisa now made her appearance. “ Ah ! my love,” said her father, “ you are just come in right time, for Aunt Pen has been gammoning me most desperately, and I want a pretty tune before I go to bed : I hope your letters were pleasant.”

“ Did they contain the information you so anxiously looked for ?” said Lionel, with an air

* The Rev. Mr. Sydney Smith.

of mock gravity. "You must pardon my curiosity."

"Indeed I shall not," said she with quickness: "you have not deserved my confidence; you hurt me very much just now, you know you did; and I have not forgiven you."

"I beg your pardon, I did not mean to vex you; though my regard for your interest might make me appear officious. Let us be friends again, and I will promise to ask no more impertinent questions: so thus let me seal my peace," and he pressed her hand with gallantry to his lips.

"There, that is right," said Mr. Mildmay: "now for some music."

"Oh, a French air on the guitar," said Lionel,—"*de grâce.*"

Louisa looked very arch as she tuned up her instrument, and sang with much expression that beautiful air from *Joconde*, which has those lively words:

“ Semillante avec les *Françaises*,
Romanesque avec les *Anglaises*,
Partout où j'ai voyagé
Suivant les pays j'ai changé.

“ Is that true ? ” inquired Lionel, with meaning.

“ Perhaps it is the case with all men,” said the young lady, “ and may be as true a representation of your sex, as Pope's is of ours, when he had the impertinence to declare, that

‘ Every woman is at heart a rake. ’ ”

“ What can this mean ? ” thought Julia, “ has she some attachment to a foreigner ? they seem to understand each other ; yet why all this mystery ? ”

“ Well, certainly, your travelled gentry have comical ways,” said good old Mrs. Penelope to her eldest niece, as she lighted her candle. “ So, good night, my dear girl, and may you at least preserve your English tastes and habits.”

“Suppose we all retire,” said Louisa.

When the sisters were at the top of the stairs, Julia hoped Louisa would have asked her in to her apartment; but no, she only embraced her tenderly at the door. “Eloise will be waiting for me,” said she, “and it is late;” as if to excuse her want of confidence.

Eloise, however, was soon dismissed, and the young lady sat down at leisure to reperuse the Baroness de Wallestein’s voluminous epistle before she retired to rest. Previous, however, to making its contents known, we must refer to the circumstances which occurred during Louisa’s visit to Paris.

CHAPTER III.

PARISIAN LIFE.

“That region where the sun’s so bright,
The air so pure, the wine so light.”

LOUISA had been for some months in rather delicate health, and Madame de Wallestein no sooner heard it, than she wrote in the most affectionate terms to insist upon her friend coming over to her ; she was certain the climate of France would entirely cure her. Mr. Mildmay resisted all entreaties for some time, but, as Louisa was undoubtedly very delicate, the physician at last advised change of air, and her brother Godfrey very tenderly offered to escort her over to Paris in the beginning of Septem-

ber 1818. The season was so unusually fine, that she really did reap immediate benefit from the difference in the climate, so that, to the great delight of her friend, she was sufficiently recovered to enter into every kind of dissipation long before the carnival commenced.

Louisa was three years younger than Madame de Wallestein, and the extreme delicacy of her complexion struck the Parisians. Many thought her handsomer than the Baroness; as on the other side of the water a *belle blonde* has the same novelty of attraction, which a *piquante brunette* has with us. Louisa had more *éclat*,—she attracted at first sight; Caroline more expression—she gained by being known. Louisa's dress was always gay, but simple; she looked lovely in any thing. Madame de Wallestein studied effect; what she wore was sure to be becoming and coquettish. Their conversation and manner had the same difference: one had more vivacity, and the other more *esprit*; both were equally graceful; but Louisa charmed

every body, while her friend was better pleased to turn the heads of a chosen few. They were each pursued by fashion and admiration ; and a poet of the day wrote a little romance upon the two beauties, which has been now long forgotten, but which had a wonderful run at the time :—it was called *Les Yeux Bleus et les Yeux Noirs*.*

* LA PROCEDURE DES YEUX NOIRS ET DES
YEUX BLEUS.

Les yeux noirs brillans d'étincelles,
Et les yeux bleus tendres et doux,
Dans leurs disputes éternelles,
Prétendaient regner seuls sur nous.
Chacun voulait la préférence,
L'un parlait contre, et l'autre pour :
Enfin ce procès d'importance
Vient d'être jugé par l'Amour.

Jamais procès à l'audience
N'avait causé tant d'embarras.
Les noirs, les bleus pour leur défense
Avaient de nombreux avocats :
Pour témoins, des baisers de flâme,
Pour défenseurs mille soupirs,
Pour preuve le trouble de l'âme,
Et pour rapporteur les désirs.

Madame de Wallestein was one of the leaders of the *haut ton*, the most admired of all *les dames du chateau*, as the circle of first-rate *distinguées* at Paris were then denominated. The balls at her hotel were among the most brilliant of the season, and no *fête* was perfect unless she and her beautiful friend were present.

The Baroness set the fashion in dress; and

L'Amour termine la querelle

Par cet arrêt judiciaire :

“ Avec des yeux noirs on est belle,

On est belle avec des yeux bleus.

Les bleus marquent plus de tendresse,

Les noirs plus de vivacité :

Les noirs annoncent la finesse,

Les bleus expriment la bonté.

Les noirs sont sujets aux caprices,

On ne peut les voir sans danger ;

Les bleus n'ont pas tant d'artifices,

Sont moins exposés à changer.

Dans les noirs j'ai mis mon délire,

Dans les bleus la tendre langueur,

L'esprit dans les yeux noirs respire,

Dans les yeux bleus c'est la douceur.”

hats and *toques* were called Wallesteins and Carolines. To become completely French was her great aim, and, after toiling month after month in pursuit of this glorious object, she was forced to be satisfied with the sentence pronounced upon her by a French *merveilleux* : “ *Que quoiqu'elle ne fût pas Française, elle méritait bien de l'être.* ”

The Baron, even the philosophic Wallestein, had his head a little turned by the extraordinary admiration his lovely wife excited : but Lionel lamented constantly the never-ending course of dissipation in which she was involved. He sometimes remonstrated, and talked of her duties as the mistress of a family and a mother : but he was told that the servants went on very well, and the child could not be better. *Madame la Maréchale*, and *Madame la Princesse*, and *Madame la Duchesse une telle*, all led the same lives, and nobody thought any thing of it :—besides Wallestein did not disapprove ! Lionel was answered.

The summer was the time to be quiet, and after *Longchamp* and all its millinery glories were over, the *saison du repos* arrived:—and were they quiet then, amid the beauties of the *vallée de Montmorenci*? No; the too indulgent Baron collected all the most agreeable society in Paris, to chase away the *ennui* which a country life inspired—not to him, but to his adored lady.

Private theatricals, pic-nic parties, inpromptu rural *fêtes*, and all those amusements which the fine climate of France gives birth to, succeeded each other so rapidly, that Louisa thought the dissipation of the country infinitely more enchanting than that of the capital;—it even swallowed up more time, it occupied all day as well as all night. After a year spent in such scenes, it was not very surprising that she should forget the rural shades of Bishop's-Court, and the simpler pleasures of her childhood. She recovered her health completely on the Continent; but, like many other fine ladies, in foreign dis-

sipation she lost her taste for every thing English. Fond of the world, of a gay and thoughtless dissipation, the insinuating flattery of Parisian *beaux* became so agreeable to her, that she wondered how she should ever be able to live without it. Her twelvemonth's leave of absence had now expired, and she received a summons home. Mr. Mildmay's letter arrived at an unfortunate moment: Madāme de Wallestein's health had been but very indifferent for some little time. Her life had of late been so fatiguing, that it was natural to suppose her indisposition arose from that source, and that a little quiet would soon restore her. But this was not the case: a medical man was called in, and the Baroness heard her worst fears confirmed—she was threatened with another confinement in the course of the spring. She was forced to give up all hope of enjoying any of the gaieties of the winter, to hear of balls which she could not attend, to read of *fêtes* which she might not witness:

alas, too hapless lady ! Could Louisa leave her friend in such a trying moment ? Impossible ! it would have been too barbarous ! The tender heart of Mr. Mildmay was softened by her representations ; he consented to spare her till after the Baroness's confinement had taken place, and till she was no longer wanted as a nurse. Monsieur de Wallestein rejoiced, from the bottom of his heart, at the prospect before him of at least six months' tranquillity ; and Lionel, who had passed the summer in England, again joined the party in the *Rue Royale*.—I would not have it supposed that our little ambassadress led a life of perfect seclusion during this spring : far from it, all her intimate friends congregated to her hotel, to prevent *la charmante Baronne* from losing her spirits ; and her wit in conversation procured her almost as many admirers as her beauty had done the year before. She gave no balls it was true, but she had a select circle every evening, of agreeable *causeurs*, and, reclining on

her *bergère*, or her sofa, *habillée en malade élégante*, the interesting languor of her fine dark eyes did full as much execution as when they sparkled with all the brilliancy of joy and health. Nor was the fair Louisa forgotten in these delightful little coteries : her voice and her guitar often charmed the society, and she formed some pleasant intimacies among the friends who frequented the Hôtel de Wallestein. From being thus thrown into the best society, her manners became highly fashioned ; and as her mornings were this year devoted to masters, she made great progress in languages and music.

Several fashionable young Englishmen were often at the Baroness's *soirées*, and among these Louisa was a particular favourite. However, their general observation upon her was one of regret, that so pretty a creature should be such a desperate flirt.

“Faith, George, you are the only man she will listen to ; such a confounded little coquette

as that Miss Mildmay is !" said one of these youths to the handsome Lord George Fitzallan, a dashing officer of Hussars, and decidedly Louisa's favourite partner. He stroked up his moustache with a complaisant air, and smiled as he cast a side-look at himself in the glass which was over the chimney piece, and then arranged the well-curled locks upon his forehead with much satisfaction.

In dressing, talking, and flirting, time passed rapidly away to Louisa ; the Baroness perhaps might think it very long to the end of April ; when all the little set who usually passed every evening with her, were delighted to hear one morning that her friend was doing as well as possible with a fine little girl. Louisa was all attention and importance as a nurse, and the Baroness in a very short time recovered perfectly.

Monsieur de Wallestein had business which obliged him to visit Coblentz in the summer ;

and it was agreed that his family should accompany him, as he might be detained some time in that part of Germany. Louisa again wrote home with a fresh request; she might never have such another opportunity of visiting the interesting scenery of the Rhine. Mr. Mildmay, as usual, all indulgence, agreed to her wishes, and she accompanied her friends to Spa. There the Baroness assumed a new character, and she certainly deserved some credit for being able to accommodate herself to circumstances, *mais une femme d'esprit sait tirer parti de tout*. The Baron had, as usual, insisted on her going through all her duties, and nursing her little girl herself, as she had succeeded so well before with the boy. The Baroness consented, but much against her will: however, she now assumed a kind of consequence from her rigorous attention to her maternal office. She found many of her old acquaintance at Spa; her infant was strikingly beautiful, she was therefore to be

constantly produced and nursed in public; and her mother had a particular costume for the occasion. She read nothing but treatises on education; she was beginning to think of teaching her little Gustavus to read: if she dined out, the nurse and baby followed her; if she went to the *redoute* or the theatre, she had to go away so early, always at the moment her friends wished her to stay, and every body was to be told the why and the wherefore.

“ *Cette pauvre petite femme, comme elle est esclave de ses devoirs, comme je la plains!*” said the sentimental Alphonse de Rosenval, to a fair Parisian *élégante* who had done him the honour to accept him for her *cavalier* in a *polonaise* at one of the balls.

“ *C'est vraiment une mère comme il n'y en a point,*” replied the lady with an affected lisp.

“ *Voilà ce qu'elle désire paroître au moins,*” observed the *caustique* Prince de Steinberg, who had overheard the conversation as he joined the

procession with Louisa, not knowing that she belonged to the Wallesteins.

In September the party left Spa, and proceeded to Coblentz. Louisa's journal and sketch-book proved how much she profited by her tour. In November they returned to Brussels, where Mr. Godfrey Mildmay met them; and soon after, the young lady took a sad and reluctant leave of her kind friends, and accompanied her brother back to Bishop's-Court, after having been absent from her family rather more than two years. The Baron and Baroness about the same time pursued their way to Paris.

The affectionate welcome which Louisa received at home, the delight with which her fond parent gazed upon her now blooming cheek, made her some little amends for the agreeable society she had left. Julia was all happiness at having her friend and companion restored to her, and Miss Birmingham pronounced their little *coterie* to be now quite complete. There was

some pleasure, too, in describing all the wonders she had seen, in making Julia and Barbara laugh at French ideas, and Aunt Pen stare with horror at French customs, while her solemn maid Dinah shrugged up her shoulders at their outlandish fashion. Godfrey, more presumptuous still, ventured to dispute the propriety of some of his fair sister's newly acquired sentiments, while he quizzed with considerable zest her French idioms, and the foreign phrases with which she interlarded her conversation.

Mr. Mildmay, in his old-fashioned simplicity, was much perplexed by the change two years had made in his daughter's character. "She is much improved in beauty, to be sure," said the good old gentleman to the venerable Dr. Askew, the vicar of Atherford: "and she is vastly smart and entertaining; but yet methinks I liked her better as she was, my dear Doctor. It is hardly worth while to cross the sea, in order to find out that Old England is not a place worth living

in. Why, too much taste seems just as bad a thing as too little." The Doctor could not but assent, and groaned in reply.

In the midst of her regret and disappointment Louisa was roused by a letter from Madame de Wallestein, with the delightful information that the Baron had just been appointed Ambassador to the Court of Great Britain, and that they should arrive in England in the course of a few weeks. Lionel was to come a little before them, in order to secure apartments for them in some hotel; and as he had some business which would call him into H——shire, she prepared her for a visit from him.

Louisa's rapture is not to be described: from the day she received the letter, till the arrival of Colonel Montague, she was in such a continual flutter, that Julia began to fancy that Lionel was, after all, the object of her sighs and tears. But this was not the case; for, as she wrote to the Baroness, "how many, many ideas

will the sight of your brother recall to my mind! Oh! my dear Caroline, when I hear his deep-toned voice, I shall fancy myself in your dear *boudoir*, and all our choicest set about us—you reclining on the sofa, in that beautiful *bonnet coquette* you used to wear with your orange cachemere; the Baron reading by the fire, or else talking politics with Lionel; and you know who tuning my guitar, while the *jolie moustache* by you, and the old Colonel described the group in verse. Ah! too happy days! *mais ils sont passés ces jours de fête*. I can give you no news. I never hear of him, or from him; I do not even know if he is expected at Norbury. But when I go there, how my heart beats!"

Whom did she mean? There was a certain gay youth who was constantly one of the tea party in the Hotel de Wallestein; we have forgotten whether he was a Marquis or a Comte, and whether his uniform bespoke him to be of the *Cavalerie légère*, or one of *les grosses bottes*:

he had a ribbon, too, suspended at his button-hole. This decoration might be the cross of St. Louis, or of the *Legion d'Honneur*; or perhaps it was *only* a Waterloo medal. *Je n'en sais rien*; only this I do know, that this same *Chevalier de la fidélité*, for that he certainly was, made himself infinitely useful to the fair Louisa: he it was who cut her pencils, who mended her pens, who copied music for her, and then sang it with her.

She always sighed when she thought of this same *militaire*; she felt how true is the remark,—

“ Que nos plus doux plaisirs
Sont dans nos souvenirs.”

JOCONDE.

And now for the Baroness's letter, which Colonel Montague had brought from London; and which, at the conclusion of the last chapter, we left Louisa reading *en robe de chambre*, before she retired to rest.

It was dated, Brunet's Hotel, March 22, 182...

“ *Ma très chère et très aimée Louise,*

“ Lionel, who will be the bearer of this to Bishop's-Court, will tell you that at last we have torn ourselves away from dear delightful Paris, and that we are *débarqués sains et saufs* in dirty, smoky, detestable London. We have taken up our abode at Brunet's Hotel, but only *pour le moment*, as Wallestein has seen a house in Portland-place likely to suit us, and we are told that is the *quartier diplomatique*; it belongs to the Spanish Minister, and the bargain with *el Senor* is already nearly completed. As it is well-furnished, we shall soon be *établis*, and I really flatter myself we shall be very comfortable; that is the English word, you know, and I am endeavouring *par force* to naturalize myself again. *Entre nous*, I think I should have preferred a house in Portman, or Grosvenor-square, but they say this is the situation chosen by all ambassadors, *et il faut se conformer aux usages*—

soit.—Oh, my dear Louisa, how I wish myself back again in France; I have done nothing but abuse England ever since I came into it. The wine, the cookery, the houses, the people, the women—heavens! what dowdies! I walked through the Park on Sunday, and I protest I did not meet one single well-dressed woman; and their imitations of French fashions are so ridiculous! I blush for their want of *tour-nure* and taste; I really felt thankful that I had no Frenchman with me. The Baron laughs at my tirades; he likes, or at least he professes to like, every thing English; and that true John Bull Lionel encourages him in all his prejudices. I shall long to hear how he finds you and all at Bishop's-Court. What pleasure it would give me to see dear Mr. Mildmay once again, and that kind Julia: I hope she loves me still, as she used to do. Lionel means to visit the dear, dear old Abbey; I do not think I could bear it: really my heart would break at the sight

of Atherford. Give my beloved godfather a kiss from his little pet Caroline, as he used to call me ; and tell him he must come to London to see me, and to be introduced to the Baron, and to my children. Gustavus is quite proud to show off his English ; he is a fine boy, and really Ulrica is beautiful. *Charmante comme sa mère*—you can guess who said that.

“ And now, my dearest friend, I have a proposal to make to you, which you positively must agree to. Come and spend the Spring with us in town ; I shall have a charming little *boudoir* to offer you. The man who had the house before his Spanish Excellency, fitted it up for his favourite mistress ; and really he must have had some taste. The furniture is beautiful ; the bed *un parfait amour*, lined with rose colour. Do persuade your father to consent to this plan, or make the excellent Julia talk him into our wishes. I will assure you an agreeable Spring. I am in excellent health and spirits,

without any of my usual drawbacks ; so I mean to be very gay, to prevent the spleen from getting possession of me. All the embassies at present here are *très mal montées*, and what with widowers, old gentlemen, and others, embarrassed with large families and small incomes, not one of them makes any effect ; so as I am decidedly the youngest, and *soit dit en passant*, the only tolerable looking woman among them, I mean, *ma très chère*, to eclipse the whole *corps diplomatique*, and to have my own *petite société très bien composée et très recherchée*. I hate the English style of routs, where, as Madame de Stael wisely observed, ‘*le corps fait plus de frais que l’esprit* ;’ but I think small select *soirées* of all the foreigners in London, with a few of the very best English women, would take amazingly among the *haut ton*, with good music to prevent dulness. Think what an effect your sweet voice will be sure to produce. How my Louisa will be admired in that charm-

ing air of Blangini's, which she used to give with such expression, such *abandon*—‘*M’aimerai-tu ?*’

“*Dites-moi donc*, have you ever seen *il caro oggetto*? Has he never visited his relations at Norbury? Your next meeting must be decisive, at least on his part, *et vous* ‘*costante per la vita*,’ of course. You will smile when you see that seal; ‘*il pastor fido*’ cannot yet name you without looking so miserable! Poor little Alphonse, I hope he is to be one of our *attachés*, but it is not certain: none of them are yet arrived except the solemn Ffifer, your aversion; but of course the Baron could not do without him, and he is very useful in teaching Gustavus, when he has nothing else to do, which saves me trouble. If you come to me, as I hope you will, I shall spare no pains to prevent your returning home Louisa Mildmay. You must not lose any more time, positively; if a certain person does not come forward very

soon, *il faut faire un autre choix*.—Why not the poor little pastor? *il vous aime bien*, and I should so like to have you well established at Paris in our set. The French *secrétaire d'ambassade* is a *très joli garçon, et aussi d'une bonne famille, et assez bien du côté de la fortune*; his mother spoke to me about him at Paris, so I am to protect him. Why might not he do?—Or, if not, there is a choice I could wish you had made, but somehow, admiring each other, there yet never seemed any sort of probability, *ma perchè*?—I mean Lionel: that would make me happy! But I know you will be furious with me, for supposing the *ben amato* is not a true knight. Well, then, I hope he will prove himself one for your sake.

“Julia, I imagine, means to pass her life in single blessedness; much good may it do her! Now that comes of living in such total solitude. Send me all the gossip of your neighbourhood, I entreat; for I have not forgotten its

grandeess, though I dare say they have me long ago. Is Lady Anne Norbury grown up as proud and handsome as she promised to be? and the stately Lord Glenmore, I hear, has married a little girl of sixteen, and is expecting soon to have an heir; well, that is certainly wonderful!

“I see I shall fill all my paper, for you will scold me if I do not send you some Paris *propos du jour*. *Madame la Princesse de Beaumont* (Miss Martin, the great city fortune that was,) has just had twins, to the utter horror of all the French ladies, who tremble lest she should set this fashion; she makes so very obedient a wife, that the old Duchesse declares *qu'elle gâte le métier de mari*, and that the English women will utterly ruin the French men, by accustoming them to passive submission. The Baron de Wolmar has heard that Lady Catherine Macneil is an heiress; so he is *très*

dévoué, and she fancies him *un très grand seigneur, un Baron de l'Empire* at least : how nicely they will both be taken in ; for he is a thorough *aventurier*, and she has nothing but her high blood, and her still higher cheek bones, for dower. Old Mrs. Martin, with her other two red-haired Graces, made a grand set at our Prince de Steinberg : after marrying the eldest to the Prince de Beaumont, she thought he would do for the second ; and so she told him, in her horrible French, that she wished her daughters to marry foreigners, but not Frenchmen, and that they had refused peers both of France and England. Poor Steinberg ! you can fancy how frightened he was. Your old *adornateur, le Comte Melchior de Soubise*, charged me with a thousand *souvenirs* to his fair enemy, as he always terms you : he has left *la Garde* for the Second Lanciers ; he had an offer to go into the First Cuirassiers, but he preferred *la Cavalerie*

legère, to *les grosses bottes*; indeed *les pantalons rouges* always carry the day, at least with the women.

“ Edward de Villars grows more *sauvage* every year: he is in the *compagnie de Noailles*, who are now at Versailles; of course Madame de Luzi has taken an apartment there, near the *Hôtel des Gardes du Corps*: you may imagine *quel scandale, c'est vraiment affreux*. The *joli petit Marquis de Ferrare* m'a prié de vous présenter ses *hommages les plus respectueux*: that cruel Colonel of his, *le Chevalier de Villemont*, put him *aux arrêts* for a month, for a mere bagatelle; so he worked away at English all the time most perseveringly with the grammar you gave him. I saw in the last *Gazette de France*, that the *Général St. Amand* marries *Mademoiselle Thérèse de Villeneuve*; the King has signed the *contrat*: imagine the despair of Madame de Belfort—*ou elle se jettera dans la devotion, ou elle*

reprendra son ancien amant le petit Commandant : nous verrons.

“ I have been miserable at leaving Paris before Longchamp, for it was expected to be brilliant beyond expression; *beaucoup de toilettes superbes*; *Joséphine de la Tour* writes me word that ‘*dos d’Araignée,*’ ‘*Puce en couche,*’ and ‘*arbre de Judée,*’ were the favourite colours. Madame la Maréchale Soult sported ‘*Queue de singe*’ really beautiful; but Mademoiselle Amenaide de Quatrebarbes quite cut her out in ‘*Eau du Nil,*’ a new shade, which many say should be called ‘*tête de nègre.*’ *Les Berrets et chapeaux à la Casque* are much worn by *les premières élégantes.* *La belle Madame Burat est plus à la mode que jamais à Longchamp; on l’a nommée la belle des belles.* *Ce n’est pas mal, comme elle a eu pour amant le brave des braves.* *La Duchesse de Melcour en est jalouse!!! mais à un point!!*

l'autre jour elles se sont rencontrées au bois ; ' Ah, Madame,' s'écria la Duchesse, avec son petit ton affecté que vous lui connaissez, ' Comme on est méchant dans ce bas monde ! imaginez-vous qu'on dit que je porte du blanc !' ' Comment Madame,' répondit la belle Burat en ouvrant ses grands yeux bleus, ' vous qui êtes si jaune !'

" Voilà des éclats de rire de tous les cotés, et vous pouvez vous figurer la mine que fit la jaune Duchesse, et le regard triomphant de l'altière riante. Ah ! c'était vraiment impayable. One must tell these things in French ; our language will not describe shades of any sort ; so matter of fact ! so downright ! At last I must say adieu. Write to me soon, and tell me when I may expect you. Pray give Lionel the history of the Birminghams ; I want to know about them. Apropos, I hear that Lord Killarney has been more lié with Edmund than ever this last winter ; however, he has at last left Naples, and is en chemin to Paris.

“ Say a thousand kind things, *de ma part*, to Julia and your dear father. Gustavus sends a kiss to Loo, Loo.—Ever your most affectionate,

CAROLINE DE WALLESTEIN.

“ My Baron *se met à vos pieds, sans que j’y trouve à redire*.—You know how he admires you.

“ P. S. I open my letter to tell you that we are going to Brighton. The house in P. Place is not quite ready for us, and W. must pay his court to his M——y. *Tant mieux*—I want to see the Pavilion. Direct—Steyne, Brighton.”

Louisa passed a sleepless night. The letter had recalled so many ideas to her mind, and brought so many almost forgotten persons before her eyes, that, if she did close them for a few moments, she always dreamt she was at some ball at Paris, surrounded by men who all asked her to waltz,—all except one, and that one was the very person she most wished for as a part-

ner. This identical individual indeed tormented her almost as much in her sleeping as in her waking thoughts. Sometimes he was in a gay Hussar uniform; then he was equally charming *en bourgeois*; one moment he appeared on horseback in the Champs Elysées; the next he was attending her *à pied* on the Boulevards. In one of her dreams she was seeking him on the *terrasse de l'eau* in the garden of the Tuileries, and all at once the scene changed, and he was walking arm-in-arm with her in the shrubbery at Bishop's-Court.

The morning found her in a most agitated and embarrassed state; she looked at herself in the glass, and thought that her heavy eyes and pallid cheeks would excite fresh suspicions in Colonel Montague's mind. Suppose he should name them to Julia:—that was an idea she could not brook. It was a very wet morning,—every promise of rain for the whole day; there would be no escape from hinting looks and in-

nuendoes of every sort.—No! better make a clear conscience at once, and tell all the secrets of her heart to that kindest of friends and advisers, her beloved sister.

She was up in a moment, and, throwing on her dressing-gown, she proceeded with the letter in her hand to Julia's room, who was not a little astonished to see the generally late Louisa half dressed before seven o'clock. That young lady immediately established herself in an arm-chair, and after reading the precious manuscript aloud quite through, and explaining, as she went along, the obscure parts, the little hints, and various asterisks, she burst into tears, after the manner of all heroines, and asked her sister if she had not perceived how unhappy she often was. Julia, like a true and amiable confidant, assured her that she had often seen with pain, that something weighed upon her mind, but that she felt it would be unkind in her to press for any communication, unless

Louisa was quite at liberty to give it. "But you cannot doubt my affection," said she, "or my anxious wish to promote your happiness."

Louisa then, after tenderly embracing her, and swearing her to secrecy, revealed the whole mystery. The individual, then, who had touched her fancy, and gained her little heart, was the young and handsome Lord George Fitzallan, the brother of the Earl of Killarney, the second son of the Marquis of Allandale, and the nephew of Lady Norbury, who, as we have already mentioned, resided in the neighbourhood of Bishop's-Court. He had been acquainted with Madame de Wallestein formerly, before she left Athlerford Abbey, and therefore, after he came to Paris, he was a constant visitor at the house. —"Did Colonel Montague know him?" was Julia's inquiry.

"Oh dear, yes! for Lionel had talked so much about Lord George before his arrival. It was about a month before the Baroness's con-

finement took place that he had been introduced to them ; and from that time he used to come every evening, and he sang so well—and was so agreeable,—and certainly—he did appear—as if he had liked her very much ;—and both the Baron and Baroness thought so too, and approved him in every respect :—and after that he had followed them to Spa ; and there she had danced every night with him, and rode with him every morning ; in short, they had been much together, and every body had said that if he meant nothing, he would be using her very ill indeed :” and here her little heart again became too full.

The story, after all, was a very common one : a smart young officer had been thrown so much into the society of a very beautiful girl, and had paid her so much attention, that she was over head and ears in love with him. Is not that an every-day occurrence ? It had been a desperate flirtation both at Paris and at Spa ; the

lady was in earnest—and the gentleman ! Ah there was the rub.

“ Did he ever say anything particular to you ?” asked the prudent Julia.

“ He told me we should see a great deal of each other at Norbury, and always seemed to hint that we should meet at Christmas.”

“ And when you were there last month ?”

“ Oh, I had a great deal of talk with Lady Anne about him ; they knew nothing where he was ; but he is a great favourite with them all, and they talked of his coming in the spring to Norbury :—but he has no fortune, I fear,” said Louisa with a deep sigh ; “ and his brother, Lord Killarney, is so extravagant.”

“ But if Colonel Montague knows him so well, he might find out where he is.”

“ Oh ! do not ask Lionel, because he has always been so angry with me.”

“ Why, what have you done to make him angry ?”

“Because, before Lord George came, I had, what he called, flirted a great deal with M. de Rosenval.”

“Oh, fie ! Louisa ; why did you do so ?”

“Indeed I never meant any thing ; but he was a very good partner, and so I always used to dance with him, and Caroline and I called him *il mio pastor fido*, but that was all ; and after Lord George came, indeed I never flirted with him in the least.”

“And now tell me honestly, my dear Louisa, do you wish to spend the spring with the Waldesteins ?”

“Wish it ! oh, my beloved Julia, there is nothing on earth I wish so much !—then I should be certain to see him again :—I should be quite happy. Oh ! do persuade Papa to let me go—will you be so kind ?” and the little coaxer threw her arms round her sister’s neck.

“I would do any thing to make you happy,”

said Julia, tenderly ; “ and you know how kind Papa always has been to both of us.”

“ But promise me you will not say a word to Colonel Montague about what I have told you.”

“ Indeed I will not ; unless I find it absolutely necessary, and for your advantage. I think you may trust me, Louisa.”

The sisters then parted, to meet again at breakfast with the rest of the family. The rain continued, and many and heavy were the lamentations it occasioned. Mr. Mildmay it prevented from attending the market-day at Merton, as was his usual custom ; Julia had intended to have been busy at her school, and Louisa had projected a ride to Norbury.

“ It is an ill wind that blows nobody good,” said Mr. Mildmay, as he took his seat at the breakfast-table ; “ this wet morning will enable me to look over some accounts that have been waiting for me this last month ; and as for you,

Lionel, there are some Atherford deeds you might as well be at the trouble of examining; as for the ladies, what with their needles and their music they are never at a loss for employment."

"You promised, Sir, to give me some account of the Birmingham family," said Lionel. "Perhaps you will have time this wet morning."

"Oh! do, Papa!" said Louisa: "for the Baroness begs me to send her their history, and if you tell it Lionel, it will do just as well."

"And so you heard from my god-daughter last night," said Mr. Mildmay. "And what does she say? Will she come and see me, and bring her husband here to visit us?"

"No; she wants you to go to London to stay with her, and she has invited me to spend the spring with them in Portland-place."

"She will not catch me in London in a hurry," said Mr. Mildmay; "but as for you, my dear girl, I think it is an excellent plan; for

I know very well that you find Bishop's-Court terribly dull ; so I am sure I have no objection, if you wish to go."

"Oh! my dear Papa! how kind this is of you," said Louisa, kissing Mr. Mildmay's hand ; "I hardly dared ask to go from home so soon again."

"Dear brother," said Mrs. Penelope, "you certainly do spoil these girls sadly. 'Too much dissipation is a bad thing for young people."

"Come, come, no preaching, Mrs. Pen. if you please; let my daughters enjoy themselves, and be happy. I don't want to have any more old maids in my family, and there are not many beaux for them in this part of the world, as you know very well."

Mrs. Penelope stroked her handkerchief down with an air of displeasure ; Lionel gave one of his sly looks at Louisa, which she perfectly understood, and which, as usual, called all the roses into her cheeks.

“ Well then, my dear,” said the old gentleman, “ go and write your answer to your friend, that it may be ready for the post ; and pray say many civil things from me to my old favourite, for all her kindness to you. I always consider her like another daughter. Well, the rain still continues, and so I shall have plenty of time for my accounts ; therefore, Colonel Montague, if you will give me your company in the library, I will tell you the history of our neighbour Sir Benjamin, and Lady Birmingham ; and after that, I will show you those deeds.”

Lionel followed the worthy squire into the adjoining room, which was rich in old books, and still older oak. Mr. Mildmay took his seat in his comfortable library chair ; his companion placed himself opposite to him on the sofa, and listened with attention to his promised narrative, the principal facts of which were :—“ That Sir Benjamin, from having been the accidental *protégé* of Governor Mildmay,

Mr. Mildmay's uncle, had risen from the condition of a poor lad to a station in which he had realized a handsome fortune, besides the property bequeathed to him by his patron ; and that Lady Birmingham, from an almost equally low origin, had been elevated by marriage with a rich West Indian merchant, the whole of whose immense wealth she inherited ; Sir Benjamin having obtained permission to add to his own the name of the latter, on his marriage and accession to the Baronetcy."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

“ Which do you prefer, Art or Nature ? ”

Strawberry Hill Anecdotes.

THE next morning Colonel Montague walked towards Merton, and on his way back determined to vary his road a little ; and instead of the path across the meadows, by turning over a well-known stile he found himself in a shady lane, which had formerly been a favourite walk of his, and which opened upon Horsely Common. Close by the gate he paused to admire a most magnificent oak-tree, which, he remembered well, his father used never to pass with-

out some observation ; even then, though unadorned with a single leaf, its stately trunk and great branches could not fail to attract some degree of attention. The following lines, which Lionel had often heard Sir Walter repeat, came into his mind :—

“ In my great grandsires’ trunk did Druids dwell ;
My grandsire with the Roman eagle fell ;
Myself a sapling, when my father bore
The hero Edward to the Gallic shore.”

He leaned over the gate as he repeated them, and stood for some time admiring a beautiful red sky, and the setting sun retiring in full glory towards the west. He was roused from his reverie by the sound of horses’ feet, and on looking up, he perceived two ladies on horseback, who were approaching at a pretty brisk canter ; the groom was at some little distance behind ; the ladies paused at the gate, which Lionel opened for them, before the servant could come up. The elder of the two gave him a broad

stare as she bowed her thanks, but said nothing ; the younger smiled most graciously, thanked him in a sweet tone of voice, and was shocked to have given him so much trouble.—What an interesting incident ! The groom was in a white and red livery. He might have asked him who the ladies were, but this he at the moment omitted, and was therefore left to ruminate upon “ the who,” and “ the what” these ladies could possibly be ; but in vain ; he could only determine that the one who spoke to him was a very pretty girl, and had a very sweet voice, that “ most excellent thing in woman.”

“ Could it be Miss Birmingham ?” *Nous verrons !* A clump of old elms on Horsely Common diverted his attention ; they stood just at the entrance of Mr. Mildmay's grounds. It was a thousand pities they should not be seen from the Park, an opening might so easily be made through the fir belt ; he thought too it would be just the place for a new lodge, which

Mr. Mildmay had often projected. He entered the plantations, and listened to the pheasants, which were just retiring to rest ; and thus, with his head full of rural ideas and remembrances of past scenes, excited by these objects, our hero reached the ancient mansion, and proceeded directly to the library.

He found Mr. Mildmay in deep conversation with a lady in a riding-habit, whom he instantly recognized as the elder of the fair equestrians who had passed him in Horsely-lane. He would have retreated, but Mr. Mildmay called out, "Come in, Lionel!"—then turning to the stranger, he said, "Lady Birmingham, allow me to present Colonel Montague to you."

Her Ladyship bowed most graciously, and, after a very scrutinizing glance, "I think," said she, "we were obliged to Colonel Montague just now for opening the gate upon Horsely Common: Barbara and I were puzzling ourselves to make out who it could possibly be.

We were just come from Norbury, and we had not heard of any stranger expected. I fancy it is many years now, Sir, since you were in this neighbourhood."

"It is above ten years: I have never been here since I first went into the army."

"Yet I assure you, my dear Sir, you live in the recollections of all about here. Since I came into this country, I have heard of nothing but the gallantry, the generosity—what shall I say that will not make you blush?—the amiability of the general favourite, Colonel Montague."

"I am sure my friends are much too good to me, but their old regard to my family must excuse their partiality."

"Oh, I see," said Lady Birmingham with playful politeness, "that you more than deserve all that I have heard of you. How painful must a visit to this neighbourhood be to your feelings! but now having come, I hope you will

find that you are still among old friends. When shall we see you at our—I mean, at your Abbey? for it is still yours; we are only temporary possessors, you know. Consider us, therefore, as the visitors, and be yourself at home. I depend upon you;” and Lady Birmingham held out her hand with much apparent kindness.

“I leave Barbara with you, my dear Mr. Mildmay; don’t let her sing herself quite hoarse this evening; but I know there is some danger with Miss Louisa. Best regards to dear Miss Mildmay—quite sorry to miss her this morning—pray beg her to send me a speedy answer to my note; and will you be so good as tell Barbara, Mr. Mildmay, that if it should rain to-morrow morning I will send the barouche and four for her. Good morning, my dear Sir.” Then turning to Montague; “I shall long to have you for my cicerone round your dear Abbey: I flatter myself you will find it in excellent order, and I must have you admire my American plants.

Lee and Kennedy tell me I have the finest collection in the kingdom. I am sure few people can have laid out so much with them as I have. Colonel Montague, lend me your arm, if you please, to mount my pretty mare;—Grey Denmark, I call her: is not she a pretty creature? I bought her last summer of Lord Mordaunt for 120 guineas; she is thorough-bred. Lord Glenmore wants her for his pretty bride, and sent to offer me 150 for her; but I refused. Adieu!”

After having seen her ladyship fairly off, Lionel returned to the library, where he found Mr. Mildmay, who observed the half-hour bell had rung some time,—“ So you and I, my good fellow, must make haste, or we shall be late.”

Before dinner, Colonel Montague was introduced to Miss Birmingham. If he had thought her pretty-looking in her habit, he was ready to call her very handsome in her evening costume.

To regularity of features, however, she had

no pretence, though the charm of countenance was all her own, and few people could help admiring her soft hazel eyes; the delicacy of her complexion was set off by jet black hair, and her colour varied every time she spoke. Her manner was unassuming, and her gentle voice, and modest, feeling countenance, formed a striking contrast to the decided tone and bold expression of her mother.

Miss Birmingham could not bear competition with the dashing and beautiful Lady Anne Norbury; she had not the fashion and elegance of Miss Louisa Mildmay; nor did she possess the tact of manner, and finished good breeding of her friend Julia. Her mild unpretending nature desired not to strike, hardly dared attempt to please: to attach those she lived with was all she wished; and in this she seldom failed, for to know her and not to love her was quite impossible.

She revered Mr. Mildmay, she admired

Louisa, she looked up to Julia, she esteemed Godfrey,—she loved them all; and the idea of leaving such tried and valued friends for the heartless crowds of London, was what weighed on her mind at this moment.

Her mother, who was given up to the world, laboured anxiously to excite in her mind a wish to see and to be seen, a desire to show all she knew, and the art to seem to know more than she really did; but all in vain, Barbara did nothing but regret that the time drew so near for their departure. The splendid mansion preparing for them, the entertainments and balls which her mother busied herself in projecting, excited no hopes in her youthful mind.

As the journey to London drew nigh, the fair Barbara felt how much she must regret her garden, and her walks and rides, and, more than all, how she should miss her dear friends at Bishop's-Court. This last thought pressed

the heaviest on her spirits; indeed she said so much about it, that at last her mother was induced to write a note to Miss Mildmay to entreat her to persuade Mr. Mildmay to allow her to accompany them up to town. Lady Birmingham left this note upon the library-table, and this was the petition she begged Mr. Mildmay would tell Julia to answer without delay.

The party were all particularly animated at dinner. Mr. Mildmay and his good sister Mrs. Penelope were never so happy as when surrounded by young people, and the three girls were all spirits and gaiety: thus inspired, could Lionel fail of being agreeable?

“I suppose, Colonel Montague,” said Barbara, “you were returning from Merton, when we passed you by the old oak. I wonder you did not take my favourite walk by the Abbey; it is a so much prettier road.”

“Oh,” said Louisa, “he *penserosoed* there for a full two hours the day before; indulged all

sorts of mournful recollections, my dear; embraced your two old favourites, that stupid grey-beard Isaac, and his long lanky wife Molly; wrote some tender lines upon some picture you are copying, and then arrived here *tout-à-fait larmoyant*."

"Fie! Louisa, how can you talk so?" said Julia.

"I was delighted," said Lionel, "to find my two old friends looking so well, and they are fortunate in being so comfortably off in their old age; but your copy of my dear mother's picture quite charmed me, Miss Birmingham: it is extremely like; I cannot say how much I was struck with it."

"Now, were you really? I hope you would not say so if you did not think it like: when you come to the Abbey next, pray examine it particularly, and point out any alterations you would wish to have made. I trust I shall finish it before I go to town, and then—I

should like to ask a favour of you,—only, perhaps, you might think it a liberty.”

“ Oh, my dear Barbara,” said Julia, “ I guess what you are going to ask, and I am certain, that, instead of thinking it such, Colonel Montague will be quite flattered by it.”

“ Do you think so ?” said Barbara, blushing ; then turning towards Lionel, she added in a very low tone, for she hardly dared to trust her voice, “ perhaps you will be so good as to present the picture from me to your sister, Madame de Wallestein. I thought she would like to have a copy of so beautiful a painting, and of one so dear to her ; I only wish it were better worth her acceptance. Perhaps, too, this may lead to my becoming acquainted with your sister : I have heard so much about her, that I quite long to know her.”

Montague was indeed flattered, and expressed his thanks in warm terms, assuring the fair artist that there was nothing in the

Abbey he and his sister valued so much as that picture.

The conversation was here interrupted by Mr. Mildmay, who had been discussing some little family business with Mrs. Penelope, which was at length settled. "So, my dear Miss Birmingham," said he, "we are soon to lose you, I find, from the Abbey; well, I dare say you are longing to be figuring away in London. I hear your new house in Regent-street is quite a palace. I suppose your little head is beginning already to run upon balls and beaux, if you would speak the honest truth," said the old gentleman, tapping his snuff-box.

"And that, Sir," said Louisa, "is a thing no woman ever has done yet since the days of Eve."

"Say you so, my dear?" said her father; "I should never have expected you, of all people, to libel your sex in such a way; you, who are just come from *le paradis des femmes*.

I thought, in your eyes the female sex were quite perfect."

"Niece," said Mrs. Penelope, arranging her spectacles and bridling up with great dignity, "you really surprise me! When once a young woman well born, and prudently educated, depreciates the moral qualities of her sex, what are we to expect from the men?"

"Why, madam, that, out of contradiction, they will bestow on us all those good qualities we confess we want. Come, aunty, do not be angry, and I will retract: in your young days, I dare say, women were angels; but now they are fallen from their high estate, and do not always speak the truth as they used to do formerly;" and the flighty young lady hummed half aloud the old words:—

"What know we of angels?
I spoke it in jest."

"Incorrigible girl!"

"Well now, my dear aunt! I will lay you

a wager, that Barbara declares she would prefer passing the winter at the Abbey to going to town ; she would rather stay and teach *broderie* to the children at widow Croft's school; make flannel waistcoats for all the old men and women in the village ; and visit old Teddy and all the Merton humdrums, than figure away at Almack's, the Opera, the French play, the Philharmonic, &c. &c. &c. Well, though she should say it, can you in your sober senses believe her?—Now, Barbara, what would you say? let us hear.”

“ You see what a madcap of a friend I have got,” said Barbara laughing: “ but really, Louisa, you are not fair ; were your brother here, I am sure he would tell you the case was not half made out. I am extremely fond of the country, and all its amusements ; but I never said I preferred these things, as you have stated, though I own indeed that I love the country best. Then, is it not natural to feel

for all the poor old people who depend upon you, particularly when they are so grateful to you? As for the people at Merton, I hope I am civil to them; but really I do not see them very often. Well then, you and Julia are my two best friends; I should be ungrateful indeed were I not to regret those who have been so constantly kind to me. How should I like London?—I know few people there; and the three winters I have passed there I have been always so tormented with masters! Every hour brought a fresh one, till I hated every thing I learned, except painting. Then, you know, I used to be pent up with poor Madame Dupont in a dark back room; my only relaxation was walking up and down that dull Berkeley Square, or else riding round and round at Fozard's riding-school, which was quite as tiresome. Can you then wonder I did not use to like London?"

"Quite an exculpatory oration!" said Louisa;

“ and delivered *con amore* ; and I see it has had its effect upon the audience, for Colonel Montague looks quite *penetré de vos sentimens pastoraux*.”

“ Louisa, my love, I wish you would not quiz so,” said her father : “ your spirits run away with you.”

“ Oh, I am well used to Miss Louisa’s wit,” said Lionel : “ I have often smarted under it at Paris.”

“ And as the burnt child dreads the fire,” said Louisa, “ I suppose you likewise rue my appearance.”

The ladies rose to leave the dining-room.—

“ Vile custom,” said Louisa, “ of this our barbarous country ! Had we been at Paris now, *mon cher* Colonel, I would have made you rue me a little longer.”

“ Then, in that case,” said Lionel, “ I am at least in this instance a gainer by this vile custom.”

As Barbara passed Mr. Mildmay, he held out his hand affectionately to her, and said, "Pray, my dear, do not be ashamed of loving the country and its simple pleasures; I only fear the time may come when you will tell another tale."

As soon as they were all established in the drawing-room, Mrs. Penelope composed herself for her usual evening nap, and the young ladies continued their conversation round the fire.

"Oh, Barbara," said Louisa, "I had no idea your heart had been so soon caught: I see this gallant Colonel, with his dark eyes and sentimental feelings, has shot you dead directly. I have been playing off all my Paris airs and graces in vain, after having had this same man as my cavalier for a whole season. See what a *pastorale* does, played in proper time and tune. You will play Damon and Phillis together admirably: his *charmant serieux*, and your *inno-*

cente douceur—oh, it will be irresistible ! The first act is over *déjà*, pray *filez le parfait amour* as quick as you can, for there is nothing so interesting as the *dénouemens*.

“ But now tell us whom you had at Norbury yesterday.”

“ Oh, there were a great many people altogether : I shall hardly be able to recollect them all. First, there was a fat tattling Mrs. Metcalf, a decided old lady ; then there was a fat tattling would-be young lady, an odd Miss Bevil ; and the two Miss Molyneuxes, of course ; you know they are a standing dish there. Dora was more pitied than ever, and Maria always talking and smiling to every body ; and then, to be sure, she might smile for some purpose.”

“ Oh ! then I suppose good old Sir Edward Barrington was there,” said Louisa.

“ Yes, he left them at the same time we did, and Miss Maria was sadly discomposed at the shortness of his visit.”

“If perseverance can succeed, she will certainly become Lady Barrington; but she has been a long time about it, for the courtship on her side began before I went to France. But whom else had you, Barbara?”

“Oh! there was that strange Dr. Sloper, and the obsequious Frenchman the Abbé le Blanc, one or two officers of the Fourth Dragons, and Lady Norbury's nephew, Lord George something or other.”

“Fitzallan it must be,” said Louisa eagerly.

“Yes, yes, the same. We were to have had Lord and Lady Glenmore also, but her ladyship was unwell.”

“Was it a pleasant party?” inquired Louisa thoughtfully. “Not to my taste,” replied Miss Birmingham, “for the business of one half of the company seemed to consist in ridiculing the other; and Lady Norbury always gives me the idea of a person obliged to submit to her

hard fate, in receiving so many persons whom she does not care about."

During this conversation Miss Mildmay had retired to her dressing-room, to read Lady Birmingham's very long note, which was as follows:—

"Atherford Abbey, Tuesday.

"My dearest Miss Mildmay,

"I have promised Barbara, before we go to town, to propose a scheme to you which she has very much at heart. Will you, my dear, become our guest for the next three months in town? I think you will have influence enough with your good father to persuade him to consent to this plan, if it be agreeable to yourself. I need not point out its advantages to you. I think I can promise you plenty of amusement, and an introduction to the very best society; for of course I mean to bring out Barbara in the first style; and with her many

advantages, both present and future, there can be no doubt that she will make some noise in the world. I depend upon your sending me a favourable answer by Barbara to-morrow, in which case I will write to town immediately, that a bed-room and dressing-room may be prepared for you; and I can also offer you a place in my barouche-landau, and your maid can follow, with mine and Barbara's, in Sir Benjamin's britscha.

“ You will find our society in town a very gay one, my dear Miss Mildmay ;—in the country, of course, we lead quite a different life. I have agreed for an excellent Opera-box in the centre of the house, and Ebers has received my draft for 300 guineas by this day's post. If you settle to accompany me, I will take up the brown mare, as well as Grey Denmark, and the little chesnut, that we may all exhibit in Hyde Park, which, I hear, is now more the ton than ever.

“ Shall I endeavour to get you a subscription for the Philharmonic?—I know it is very difficult, but I pique myself on doing impossibilities. We have not yet determined about the Ancient Music; perhaps one concert a week may be enough. You see I write as if it were all fixed that we are to have you, and I do really hope that you will consent. I am delighted to hear that both Mr. Mildmay and Mrs. Penelope are so free from rheumatism, notwithstanding all these cold east winds. I shall probably see them this morning; but the sun shines so bright, I have little hopes of finding either you or Miss Louisa. Barbara summons me to mount, so adieu for the present. Ever, my dear young friend,

“ Most faithfully your's,

“ BETTINA BIRMINGHAM.

“ We stayed last night at Norbury, as formal and disagreeable as usual. We rode back here to luncheon, and have to let our horses rest, before

we set off again for Bishop's-Court. I am very busy in the shrubbery, enlarging my American plantations, and making a new rose-bed ; I have just got 180 new sorts from Lee and Kennedy ; and my friend, Governor Smith, has sent me several thousand new seeds from the Cape. Pray tell Miss Louisa, my China silks and Indian fans are arrived quite safe—I long to show them to you. Our new coach is to be ready for the birthday ; it is in Leader's best style. I shall present Barbara at the drawing-room, which I hear is to be held the week before. I have ordered her a splendid set of amethysts for that day, at Hamlet's. But I must conclude—once more adieu."

When Miss Mildmay returned to the drawing-room, she was agreeably surprised to find her brother Godfrey was arrived ; the Weldon Sessions being over sooner than he expected, had set him at liberty. Godfrey Mildmay was over-

joyed to meet his old friend and schoolfellow Lionel, whom he had not seen for so many years ; and the girls were amused at the pleasure each took in relating some of their old school adventures. Godfrey was some years older than his friend, a sensible rising young man, much esteemed in his profession, but very inferior to Montague in personal advantages : he had a kind of dry caustic humour, which made him at times very entertaining. His sister Julia doated on him ; but his total want of polite accomplishments often shocked Louisa, who declared it was impossible to make any thing of him but *un vrai Rosbiff*. His father had the highest opinion of the integrity of his character, and felt justly proud of his abilities and industry.

During tea, Colonel Montague, Miss Mildmay, and Miss Birmingham, had got into a private conversation, and Louisa, who was next her brother, observing him yawn once or twice,

in a way that might be forgiven to a young barrister who had closed a very fatiguing week with a ride of ten miles, attacked him thus :—

“ Pray, Godfrey, what have you and all your musty *confrères* been about at the sessions? Had you any dandies on the bench?”

“ I really can't say,” said Godfrey, thinking of something else.

“ Well now, that is odd ; but I suppose you learned fellows make use but of two powers at a time,—so, having to hear and to speak, you never use your eyes ; in which case they are returned home fresh to admire the ladies of Bishop's-Court. Do take a cup of strong green tea, to refresh you ; there,” said she, pouring out a cup as she spoke. “ Now how many lumps ?—Six ?—Mercy ! how outrageous ; but I suppose you are a friend to Colonial produce.”

“ Don't waste your wit so, Louisa,” said Godfrey, “ for I am tired and stupid.”

“ Oh, then you require exciting ; a little ex-

erotion is always necessary, my good brother, in order to be agreeable. Begin by saying something pretty to each of the ladies in turn. What think you of Aunt Pen's cap as a subject?" in a whisper—"Just arrived from her friend Miss Parry, the milliner at Merton.—Lionel," stretching across the table, "I want to speak to you. Do you remember la Baronne de Marsan's head-dress, at the great ball at the Hôtel-de-Ville, which Wallestein used to call *une casserole*—what jokes were made upon it? And then that Polish Prince Yablonouski, with his black hair and red whiskers, who was called *Rouge et Noir*; and those two English girls with black petticoats and red bodies, who used to dance with him, and whom he always termed, '*les jolies petites diablesses de Londres*?' Now I think I will make a drawing of Aunty's cap; the title shall be *La chateau en Espagne*, and the device, Madame de Sevigné's pretty motto, *L'atto non temo*. But, I see, no one listens: Mrs. Penelope

snoring, my father nodding over the Quarterly, Godfrey resting in the great chair, both body and mind; Barbara, Julia, and Lionel, whispering very rudely. Come, good people, I am in the humour to sing;" and she tuned her guitar and gave them a lively little French air with much spirit.

When she had finished, she flew to the piano.

"Now, Colonel Montague," said she, "you have often sung with me formerly, and I want you to take the second in that old air, *Pescator dell' onde*."

Lionel obeyed: their voices accorded perfectly, and they sung several little things with great effect.

Louisa then favoured them with some Spanish airs to the guitar. She had learnt the true Spanish strike from some Castilian Don, who had been a beau of hers, somewhere on the Continent.

“ Louisa,” said Julia, “ let us hear Barbara.”

“ Oh dear,” said Barbara, “ after Louisa’s beautiful voice, can you wish to hear me? I never could catch the Italian style,” said she, “ much to mamma’s mortification. Mine is mere ballad-singing; but if it will give you any pleasure, I will try.”

She sat down to the instrument, and gave the favourite Scotch ballad of “ Auld Robin Gray,” with so much pathos and feeling, that even Godfrey was charmed; as for Lionel, he was perfectly enchanted. Her voice was not powerful, but it was so sweet, and so pathetic.

“ Oh, before you go, Miss Birmingham,” said Godfrey, “ do favour us with my favourite Scotch song, ‘ Should auld acquaintance be forgot.’ ”

Barbara immediately complied.

When she had concluded that beautiful air, all were profuse in their thanks, except Lionel; he only looked what he felt.

“ Well now,” said Godfrey, “ let each of the young ladies have their turn. Julia, you must give us the Overture to Alexander’s Feast ; I call Handel’s, music for the Gods, not like your French frippery.”

“ Pray,” said Mrs. Penelope, “ let the concert conclude with ‘ God save the King,’ for harp and pianoforte.”

“ No, no !” said Mr. Mildmay, “ Rule Britannia’ must be the grand finale.”

“ And then to bed, perchance to sleep,” said Godfrey, “ for, by that time, I shall be tired even of sweet sounds.”

CHAPTER V.

THE DEPUTATION.

Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show ;
But wonder on, till time makes all things plain.

Prologue to Pyramus and Thisbe.

EARLY the next morning, Mr. Mildmay was seen taking his usual walk with his son round the grounds of Bishop's-Court. Godfrey was relating to him the principal causes which had been settled during the sessions at Weldon Regis: the father made his remarks on the different decisions that had been given ; inquired about several poachers, who he hoped had been

convicted and sent to the house of correction. Then came the subject of the approaching election for Merton. Godfrey had had much conversation with Mr. Bennet, son of the late member, who decidedly declined standing. He had fully explained to that gentleman all Mr. Mildmay's reasons for wishing him to stick entirely to the law, which few Parliament-men ever did.

They had talked over all the most likely candidates. It had been supposed not impossible for Lord Norbury to have thoughts of bringing forward his nephew Lord George Fitzallan, but one and all the country gentlemen were determined to oppose such an attempt; and Godfrey believed Lord Norbury had ascertained the feelings of the county too well to try this time.

Here their conversation was interrupted by one of the servants, who announced the arrival of some gentlemen from Merton, who proved

to be a deputation for inviting Colonel Montague to offer himself: a proposal highly approved, and warmly seconded by Mr. Mildmay, who immediately undertook all that was necessary for insuring his friend's election, only blaming himself for his remissness in not having been the first to think of, and set forward, so proper a proposal. The preliminaries having thus been gone through, it was at length determined that the whole party should adjourn to Merton; when Miss Birmingham, looking through the window, exclaimed:—" Bless me, there is Colonel Montague, and your brother, both mounted! Oh, open the window, dear Louisa, and ask them what all the fuss is about: and if it is really true that they are going to elect your friend member for the borough."

Louisa threw open the sash, and exclaimed: " Colonel Montague, pray do not be so rude as to go away without taking leave of Miss Bir-

mingham : you know she returns to the Abbey this morning, and perhaps may not see you again."

Both the young men obeyed the summons, and rode to the window. " Well, ladies," said Godfrey, " you must wish my friend Lionel success ; he is going to offer himself to represent the borough of Merton Minster ; a deputation of six gentlemen came on purpose to invite him. I am quite sorry we are to lose you so soon, Miss Birmingham ; I was in hopes you would have stayed and canvassed with us. Make plenty of red and white cockades, girls, against we come back."

" May I hope you are interested in my success, Miss Birmingham ?" said Lionel softly.

" Oh, indeed you have my warmest good wishes : " said Barbara, with much animation. " I wish I could be of use to you in any way ; but you will not forget to call on Mamma, she knows all the people about."

“ My first call will be on Lady Birmingham,” said Colonel Montague ; “ therefore perhaps I may see you again ; I am afraid now I must say good-b’ye.”

“ Well, this is strange,” said Louisa, as the young men rode off : “ I shall be inclined to reverse Napoleon’s famous saying ; for, in this case, it is ‘ *du ridicule au sublime il n’y a qu’un pas.*’ How provoking now it is, Barbara, that you should be going this morning ; for, to be sure, you and Lionel do take so violently to each other, that you ought to stay to hear about his success.”

“ Louisa must have her joke,” said Barbara ; “ but I really am quite sorry that mamma settled to send the horses this morning.”

“ Could not you send them back,” said Julia, “ with a note to Lady Birmingham ? I am afraid there is not a man left about the house, or we might send word for them not to come.”

“ Oh, it is too late now,” said Barbara,

“ they would be set off; and I am afraid mamma would not be pleased were I to send them back; but you will promise to let me know all that happens. I wonder whether we can command many votes; I do hope mamma will exert herself for Colonel Montague.”

At this moment the footman entered with a note for Miss Birmingham; “ Oh, it is from mamma, I see,” said the young lady; “ then the horses are come, I fear.” But after perusing the contents of the billet, “ Oh, I am so glad!” said she, “ Mamma writes me word that she is so busy with the steward auditing the accounts, and settling every thing with the housekeeper about our journey to town, that if I am not in your way, perhaps you will permit me to stay a day or two longer with you.—I wonder whether you will,” said she, looking archly at Julia.

“ My dearest Barbara, how happy this good news makes us!” said Miss Mildmay. “ Pray write Lady Birmingham word, how glad we

shall be to keep you as long as she will allow us."

"I think I know a certain gentleman, who will be much displeased at this arrangement," said Louisa; "but do not you want to write, Barbara? here is my desk at your service."

"Thank you; but, as I must speak to my maid, I will write in my own room."

As soon as Barbara was gone, "Julia," said Louisa, "I would lay a good deal, that this is all a scheme of Lady Birmingham's to keep Barbara in ignorance of her projects with regard to Hollins; for I am told she certainly intends to get him proposed as a candidate for Merton. At all events, I see her drift is to keep her manœuvres a profound secret from all of us; and to the world it will appear as if she were favourable to Lionel, from her daughter remaining here. Commend me to such crooked policy. What do you mean to do, my dear sister, about her wish to have you with them in London?"

“I have hardly thought of it at all yet,” said Julia: “you know I am not very partial to London; but if I could suppose I should be any comfort to our dear Barbara, it certainly would be a great inducement to me to go. But I must have a long talk on the subject with my father, before I settle any thing.”

At dinner, the family party met all again in high spirits, and the gentlemen were not a little pleased to find Miss Birmingham still at Bishop's-Court. Each had a great deal to relate, and they all seemed highly pleased with what had passed. Mr. Mildmay had found Mr. Molyneux, the high-sheriff, at home, and had been quite delighted with the account his old friend gave him of the deputation from Merton. He remembered Lionel well, as a fine spirited boy, and expressed himself most anxious for his success. They had gone together to Merton to hear what had been done there; and Mr. Molyneux had then been introduced

to Colonel Montague. Moreover it had been determined in full committee, that the worthy squire of Bishop's-Court should propose the candidate on the day of nomination, and that Mr. Sydenham, of Elsinore Lodge, should second him: the last mentioned gentleman happened most opportunely to call on Mr. Wilson the banker, while Mr. Mildmay was there, and he readily agreed to give every assistance in his power to Lionel's party. Lord Norbury had also given a most obliging answer.

Lady Birmingham was not at home when they called at Atherford Abbey; but Mr. Mildmay delivered his letter himself to her ladyship's butler, with a strict charge to present it the very instant she came in. Sir Benjamin was not yet returned from Liverpool.

Lionel had been most highly gratified with his reception at Merton; he had been introduced to some of the leading people in the borough, who seemed all unanimous in their

approval of him, and in promising him their support.

The general feeling of good-will towards him was certainly very strong; his being one of the old Montague family seemed alone to insure his popularity; and Godfrey made his sisters laugh with the ridiculous account he gave, of how much his friend's handsome person was admired by sundry most respectable old ladies at Merton.

CHAPTER VI.

GRANDEES.

Begin ! who first the catalogue shall grace,
To quality belongs the highest place ;
My lord comes forward ! forward let him come,
Ye vulgar, at your peril give him room.

YOUNG'S SATIRES.

ON the Saturday morning, Mr. Mildmay proposed to the two young men, that they should all ride over to Norbury, as it would be as well that Lionel should be introduced to that family before the election. The Earl received them with the utmost urbanity ; but nothing could be more flattering than his reception of Colonel Montague, for he was a complete man of the world, a courtier, and

a politician, one who perfectly understood the value of words, and knew how far he might go without committing himself. It had been often said of Lord Norbury, that any one following him up St. James's-street, and observing his manner of returning the bows of his acquaintance, might safely pronounce on their respective ranks, so nicely did he attend to the minutiae *des bienséances*. He was a little-minded man, with much experience of the world, and not one grain of heart in his whole composition; he had risen to high rank by the talent of bending men to his purpose, and, as this was the qualification he had found most useful himself, so it was the only one he esteemed in others. He loved—himself alone; and he wished well to his family, as belonging to himself, not for their own individual merits.

The Countess was a very different person; the rock on which she split was pride—pride of blood, pride of situation. The world with

her was divided into two classes—patricians and plebeians; she knew of no shades, no go-betweens—people whom every body knows, or people whom nobody knows; and to belong to the latter class was certainly, in her opinion, one of the severest visitations of Heaven: it seemed to her as if it was *hors de noblesse point de salut*. Lady Norbury's good qualities were all clouded by these violent, ultra aristocratic notions; for she was in reality a kind-hearted woman, with a well-cultivated mind; and, when she chose to unbend, she could be very agreeable; but this was rarely the case, for she was fastidious in no common degree, and it was difficult to meet with any person less generally liked than the haughty Countess of Norbury.

Lady Anne, her daughter, was extremely beautiful, fascinating, and accomplished, but her character had been ruined by excessive flattery. She was haughty, selfish, and unfeeling, with a power of concealing these defects

from a common observer by her wit and vivacity. The power of pleasing she considered as an art reducible to rules, of which she had made herself mistress; her pride was not, like her mother's, pride of rank, but pride of talent. She loved flattery, though she despised the flatterers. She laughed at every body and every thing, for frolic was her passion; fools of all kinds she thought fair game; indeed, no foibles could escape her; her father's manœuvres, her mother's *hauteur*, were equally amusing to her. All religious principle had been forgotten in her education; she had never in her life paused for a moment to reflect, and it was her favourite maxim, that

“ Le Monde est plein de foux,
Et qui n'en veut pas voir,
Doit se nicher dans un trou,
Et casser son miroir.”

Lord Mordaunt, the only son of this illustrious family, possessed the same kind of dis-

position as his sister, but without any of her wit ; he had all the pride of his mother, without her heart : and the same love of intrigue as his father, but with very inferior talents. . He had been thwarted by the Earl in his first wish, which was to shine on the opposition benches, probably from a kind of spirit of contradiction, because his father held a very good place under Government ; but Lord Norbury had announced to the young man his fixed determination to reduce his allowance one half, the very first show he should make of joining the other party. Lord Mordaunt was therefore obliged to submit for the present to obscurity ; and this only increased his cynical humour : he revenged himself by entering into every sort of dissipation, and attaining all the celebrity which *ton* can give in the nineteenth century to the frequenters of clubs, gambling-houses, the noble associates of sharpers and jockeys—glorious pre-eminence ! His lordship wanted only to have been engaged in some

crim. con. affair, with a duel at his heels, in order to have attained to the pinnacle of that kind of fame so eagerly sought for by our young nobility.

Such was the family to which Mr. Mildmay now presented his young friend; and Lord Norbury really exceeded himself in the politeness of his manner and the expression of his good-will towards this worthy old gentleman. His lordship had many reasons for wishing to be on good terms with Mr. Mildmay, whose age and popularity gave him a degree of weight in the country not exactly belonging to his situation, but arising from the tried respectability of his character.

Provided Lord Mordaunt was secure of his seat, Lord Norbury cared little who was the other member for Merton Minster; yet it would certainly be far more agreeable to have a gentleman for his son's colleague, than such a low-born fellow as the Attorney Hollins.

Moreover, Montague might eventually become a man of consequence ; it was in the cards, as his brother Sir Edmund had only a daughter, and the estate was entailed on the male heir. On these calculations, Lord Norbury determined on receiving the young man with the most distinguished courtesy, and to overpower him with his gracious affability. He remained at home the whole morning, in order to receive the party from Bishop's-Court, and played his part with his usual dexterity : he was much disappointed, however, in finding Lionel a frankly character, one who felt his advantages without presuming upon them—very different to the raw youth Lord Norbury had hoped to see. He found him a person on whom flattery was quite thrown away, and who had seen too much of the world to care for the unmeaning phrases of a statesman, even though he were an Earl. Lord Norbury saw in a *clin-d'œil*, that the new aspirant would, from choice, prefer the straight

road of honour to the crooked paths of policy. Such a character did not suit his Lordship's taste; their views of life must always be opposite. The first five minutes convinced him that he and Lionel would never be any thing more to each other than they were at that moment—but what then? The young soldier was handsome and accomplished, and engaging; such a man would always have followers and admirers, and would therefore be useful to appear at least among Lord Norbury's partizans; it would have its effect upon the world.

Lady Norbury received our hero graciously, because he was a Montague, and his family had fallen from their high estate; high blood could ennoble any situation, and her ladyship was never more happy than when she could thus publicly avow her respect for pure descent.

The Lady Anne was beginning to be heartily tired of all her country flirts, and to sigh for a wider field of conquest in London; but, *en at-*

tendant, she had a few weeks to dispose of; and how could they be better employed than in turning the head of a handsome Colonel of the Guards? He had completely the air of a man of the world—just what she wanted: he would not do *de fait*, being only a younger brother, with nothing but his commission; though, after all, many a right honourable had done worse. True, thought Lady Anne, but love in a cottage, nay even in a *ferme ornée*, will never do for me. I must have rank and wealth to support it; that is decided. But there is no haste at present. I have plenty of strings to my bow already, so, *pour passer le temps*, I may just as well try to touch this man's heart: it keeps one in practice too, which is always a great point.

Lady Anne had yet another reason: she thought, it was impossible but that her very particular friend and *protégée*, Louisa Mildmay, must already have captivated Colonel Montague; and her ladyship felt somehow as if she should

like just to try if she could not supplant her friend. Not that she would have breathed such a thing to the winds;—no;—but there could be no possible harm in coquetting a little with him, just for the pleasure of making Louisa somewhat jealous. Besides, in winter, any thing is fun in the country; and what young lady of rank and fashion would wish for better amusement than to make a man in love with her before Easter, in order to have the pleasure of cutting him afterwards?—Portman Square and Norbury were so different! and what man could be so ignorant as not to feel that?

Besides, Lady Anne had always thought Louisa very pretty; nay more, even elegant; quite a girl of the world, who knew perfectly what she was about with men, and had always a great deal to say to them:—but then she considered herself to be so much more beautiful, that there could be no real danger from such a rival. True! a man might flirt with

Louisa ; but should her ladyship wish to fascinate and draw him off, she must succeed. A young man too, who probably had not seen a great deal of the world, would inevitably be *éperdument* in love with her, if she chose it.

This, then, would be a happy moment to exercise her powers.

Such were the various motives which prompted her to exert all her arts of pleasing on the devoted Lionel Montague. He was very much struck at first sight with her beauty, and he thought her very pleasing ;—no, that is too faint a term—very captivating—a most charming woman—most uncommonly clever and agreeable !—and could Lady Anne have heard his report of her to the two young ladies at Bishop's-Court, she would have been more than satisfied with her *coup d'essai*.

Lord Mordaunt was out, coursing with his cousin Lord George Fitzallan ; and all the rest of the party in the house were engaged in their

morning amusements, except those we have named.

Lord Norbury was outrageous at the idea of such a fellow as a low-bred attorney at Merton polluting the House of Commons; he was astonished that his good friend Lady Birmingham could have taken such a measure without consulting him:—very extraordinary!—certainly a most ill-advised step: however, he hoped he might congratulate Colonel Montague upon every prospect of success,—Mr. Mildmay's interest was so much the best of any in the county—(this speech was attended with a side-bow to the old gentleman)—and Mr. Godfrey Mildmay would, he was sure, prove himself so active a friend, one who understood canvassing so thoroughly. His lordship felt conscious of how little use his poor endeavours could be; or otherwise, any service he or Mordaunt could be of.—He hoped Mr. Mildmay would remember to point out any thing they could do to promote

Colonel Montague's success. The Earl piqued himself upon the generality of information which he possessed, and of the tact with which he understood how to adapt himself to men of different professions and pursuits. As soon as he was weary of holding forth upon military affairs with Lionel, he discoursed agriculturally with Mr. Mildmay; and then turning to Godfrey, he talked over the late sessions at Weldon, in order to display his considerable familiarity with law terms.

His lordship regretted the absence of Lord Mordaunt and Lord George Fitzallan; he believed they were both coursing. The pleasures derived from field sports, so exciting to most men, he never had felt. From early youth his mind had been devoted to politics: he had had no time but for business: long habit had made business pleasure to him. He sometimes felt disposed to regret that his son's pursuits were so different to his own, but he had one consola-

tion—though Mordaunt would not perhaps be a great man, that love of sporting would probably render him a happy one.

What could his auditors say? they could only hope it would. But Lord Norbury was one of those whose conversation consists chiefly in truisms: he was a prodigious egotist, and never could suppose any subject so interesting as what related to himself.

Before they took leave, the Earl insisted on Lionel's fixing a time when he could give them more of his company; and after some discussion it was agreed that after the election was over, and all his business concluded, he should come over to Norbury for a few days. The invitation was extended to Godfrey; and the Countess sent a most gracious message to the Miss Mildmays, requiring their presence also. Mr. Mildmay, she knew, never slept out of his own house; but, if he would for once venture, her ladyship would promise him a very warm room.

He, however excused himself, as well as his daughter Julia, who would by that time be gone to town: but he promised to use all his influence with Louisa to induce her to accept the invitation; and, by way of temptation, the Countess sent word that it would be a very select party, as she expected the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Derwent, and his Duchess, and Lady Mary Derwent; her brother Lord Tresilian, and his Lady; Lord Glenmore and his beautiful bride; Sir Edward Barrington, one of the county members, besides other personages of less importance.

“This young gentleman,” said Lord Norbury, turning towards Colonel Montague, with a smile, “has, perhaps, to learn, that the Derwents and Glenmores are our Montagues and Capulets; and I am not a little pleased at the idea of their all meeting for once in peace and tranquillity under the roof of so insignificant a person as your humble servant.”

This was the parting speech, as the three gentlemen mounted their horses for Bishop's-Court.

"What did Lord Norbury mean by the Montagues and Capulets?" said Lionel, as they rode along.

"A classical allusion, I presume," said Godfrey, "to the feuds which have divided the two great families of this country for above half a century. Many a contested election have they fought against each other with the utmost fury, till both were nearly ruined."

"But now, Lionel, what do you think of Lady Anne? She is handsome, is not she?"

"Oh, beautiful! I never saw a finer head; and then so much *esprit*!"

"Yes, she has plenty of that," said Godfrey, "if she had it but a little more in command. She has been much talked of for a Lord Dorville, a gay young man with a large fortune, who is always dangling after her; but I cannot

help thinking Lady Norbury intends her for her nephew, the celebrated Earl of Killarney, the son of the old Marquis of Allandale."

"What! the Grecian traveller?"

"The same: his younger brother, Lord George Fitzallan, you will find at Norbury next week."

Mr. Mildmay now rode up to the two young men. "What a nice estate this is of Lord Norbury's!" said he; "and all in a ring fence: and such excellent land too! Why, Lionel, see! it goes as far as yonder fir plantation to the west."

"If I remember right," said Montague, "Lord Norbury's estate is not a very extensive one; not to be compared either with the Duke's, or Lord Glenmore's."

"Oh dear no!" said Mr. Mildmay. "He is quite a man of yesterday; but the others are the two great features of this part of the world, the grand aristocracy of this

county, who had been balanced against each other since the Revolution. The Norburys, however, have a kind of official importance; he is a great man with his party, one whom they can depend upon, and whose services are rewarded with a good place. Sooner than that he should go without, one would be made for him. He has got every thing he has dared to ask for. Lady Norbury has always been a favourite at court, which gives *éclat* for the time being: so that, though in fact very second-rate personages, yet on the theatre of the great world they perform a more prominent part, and are much oftener named, than either of the great guns of this county."

"Thank you, Sir," said Lionel, "I feel now quite at home in the *carte du pays*, and trust I shall know how to keep up with all parties."

CHAPTER VII.

FRENCH FASHIONS.

“Nay, oft in dreams invention we bestow,
To change a flounce, or add a furbelow.”

POPE.

THE nomination went off with great *éclat*, and the show of hands being almost entirely in favour of Colonel Montague, he was declared duly elected, to the no small mortification of Lady Birmingham; on whom fell all the disgrace of having proposed the unpopular candidate, Hollins. Most of the principal residents in the vicinity having attended, it was agreed at the dinner which followed, that a ball should

succeed, in celebration of the event : a proposal which could hardly fail to prove particularly gratifying to the ladies.

“ Well,” said Mr. Mildmay the next morning, while seated at breakfast, “ we must drive over to the Abbey some day this week before Barbara leaves us, to prove to Lady Birmingham that we none of us bear malice. And then, my dear Julia, you can finally settle every thing about accompanying her ladyship to London ; I think it will be an excellent scheme for you.”

“ If I could feel certain, my dear father, that you would not want me, I should like it much : but, if Louisa should go to stay with the Baroness, can you spare me also ?”

“ To be sure I can ; don't make such an old man of me. Sister Pen will be always here, you know ; and then Godfrey going backwards and forwards, and your letters, will tell me all the news. I shall be so happy if I think you are both amusing yourselves—so much better for

you than moping here all the winter;—oh, I would have you go by all means, my love.”

Julia took her father's hand affectionately: “You are only too good to us all, my dear Sir.”

“Here comes Barbara,” said the kind-hearted old gentleman; “now make breakfast, for I am very hungry. Lionel and Godfrey are certain not to be in time, after their toasts last night. Louisa, as usual, must be behindhand; and sister Pen is vastly busy in the dairy.”

As soon as Barbara appeared, the family schemes were all unfolded to her without reserve; she was much delighted to find that Julia had made up her mind to accompany them to town.

After some little discussion, it was at last finally settled, that as Lady Birmingham must pass Bishop's-Court on her road south, the best plan would be for her to stop and take up Julia: then it would save any farther trouble. The

next arrangement was not so soon made ; for it required much consideration to understand that most intricate of all subjects, the toilette ; and to determine that very important point, what dresses they should wear at the election ball. Of course they must be all three alike, and there was not much time for preparation. Besides which, as mistress of the house, Julia had a thousand orders to give, and regulations to make, before her intended journey and long absence from home ; for she was a most exact and orderly person, and had generally arranged all the household concerns long before Louisa had left her bed.

The ball-dresses were the first object, and those high priestesses of Fashion, usually denominated ladies'-maids, were summoned. First came the important Mrs. Tiffany, a sage matron of considerable experience, on whom the care of adorning the gentle Barbara had long devolved. *La jeune et gentille Eloïse*, a Parisian damsel of

acknowledged taste and address, Louisa's attendant, next showed off her airy graces ; followed by the staid Mrs. Dinah, the venerable handmaiden of Mrs. Penelope Mildmay. These ladies were succeeded by a pretty rosy-faced girl, named Lucy Brown ; whom Julia had taken into her service when Louisa went abroad and took with her a highly fashionable, thorough-bred English abigail, who, when at Paris, bestowed her fair hand on an elegant *du jour*, M. Adolphe, *coiffeur*, who had *une boutique bien assortie au Titus moderne, coin de la rue Taitbout*. This important procession was closed by Betty, the house-maid, carrying in a pile of band-boxes. The ladies were all assembled in the drawing-room previous to the arrival of the abigails, so that, when the whole party of females was collected, the confusion of tongues which issued may be conceived, as well as the spirited discussion which took place, from the variety of opinions entertained on the subject of

taste. Silks, satins, and laces, were fairly discussed. *Tulle* was placed in battle array against *gaze*,—not gauze, gentle reader; names, not things, are altered, *Les ruches* were opposed *aux volans*, *les plis aux rouleaux*; et *les plis contrariés* were preferred *aux bouillons*. Then came a point of great importance to be decided, whether *bouquets détachés* or *guirlandes* were to be chosen.

The gentlemen would have been surprised could they have heard that one gown was to be *bordée d'un ruban à cheval*, while another trimming was to be *arrangée en rivière*. *Les coques* and *les tirebouchons* had each their partizans. *Les crevés et les coquilles* were both condemned.

The most learned painter would have been puzzled with the new names given to colours. There was the *eau de Nil*; the *oreille d'Ours*; the *flamme de Ponche*; the *Raisin de Corinthe*; the *dos d'Araignée*, and the *réveil de l'Eléphant*: besides many others, equally distinguished and extraordinary.

Next came the important point of the *façon*. Louisa recommended Mrs. Penelope to have her rich brocaded grey *gros de Naples* made *à la vierge*; which not a little scandalized Mrs. Dinah, and she determined that her own should be *à la demi vierge*, and Julia's *à l'enfant*; while she advised Barbara to have her's *en cœur*, (which astonished Mrs. Tiffany), unless she preferred the *forme à la Grecque*, a term which quite confounded simple Lucy Brown.

All went on harmoniously, till Mademoiselle Eloise, fresh from Paris, rich in mythological ideas, and happily gifted with words at will, displayed the full force of her eloquence in praise of certain *Corsage à la Venus qui faisait les délices de tout Paris*, and which had been first worn by *Madame la Baronné de Wallestein, qui l'avait commandé chez la fameuse Mademoiselle Virginie*.

Notwithstanding this tirade, Mrs. Tiffany ventured not to approve of this Gallican pro-

duction, inasmuch as she decided that it looked just for all the world like the bare naked stays, and would be a scandal for any decent young lady to wear. Mademoiselle Eloise fired up at this, and said something very smart upon *les préjugés insulaires*. Mrs. Tiffany, not quite understanding, replied in a higher key, inveighing loudly against French frippery and impertinence, in which she was joined in chorus by all the other abigails. Mademoiselle Eloise shrugging up her shoulders quite à la Française, exclaimed with an air of sovereign contempt, "*Mon Dieu ! que les Anglaises sont bêtes ! elles ne savent pas ce que c'est que la mode ! Le ciel n'a pas voulu leur accorder de la tournure, et elles ne veulent pas profiter du savoir des autres. Mais moi qui suis Parisienne née à Paris élevée à Paris, car le bon Dieu sait que de ma vie je n'avais jamais passé le pont de Neuilly avant de venir dans ce vilain pays des brouillards ; moi qui ai été pendant deux ans première demoiselle chez*

Madame Carson la mère, et puis pendant six mois chez sa fille, Madame Maradon Carson, personne aussi célèbre pour sa coupe que pour la fraîcheur et le bon goût de ses garnitures contrariées de qui tout Paris raffola, qui fait des envois chez tous les étrangers, même dans les pays les plus barbares, par exemple chez les Russes et jusqu'en Ecosse ;—moi, quoique je ne veuille pas me vanter de mon savoir-faire, car Dieu sait qu'il est déjà assez connu, cependant j'ose me flatter que je sais ce que c'est que le bon goût."

This harangue was hurried through with all the volubility of a Frenchwoman touched in the tenderest part. Having finished her speech, and before her audience could recover from their surprise, she seized the unfortunate corsage à la Venus, the cause of the dispute, and flounced out of the room, clapping the door most violently after her, and declaring that her rivals, at least, should not have the advantage of her patterns. Louisa burst into

a loud laugh at this furious tirade, and flew after the offended maiden to find some means of pacifying her incensed tongue.

Barbara and Julia exchanged looks, but thought best not to take any notice, and therefore busied themselves in looking over their finery. Lucy Brown took her handkerchief, in order to conceal an inclination to smile: the dignified Mrs. Tiffany held her head higher than ever, but propriety forbade a visitor's interference: unutterable were the looks of indignation visible on the countenance of the sage Dinah; she wanted nothing but an opportunity to give vent to her wrath. Mrs. Penelope at length afforded her an opening, exclaiming, in a still more solemn tone than usual, while in the act of taking snuff,—“ So much, niece, for a French tongue.”

Louisa now re-entered, bringing an apology from Madame Eloise, that her anger arose from

misunderstanding the force of an English word. Thus was tranquillity restored.

A debate then ensued whether plain red, or variegated roses, would look best; but Mrs. Tiffany was quite of opinion that plain red roses would be all the go among the Merton ladies, and, to be sure, the party from Bishop's-Court would wish to be distinguished by the superior elegance of their dresses.

"Well, really," said Julia, "I think it a very good idea. What say you, Barbara?"

"Oh, do not ask me," said Miss Birmingham with her usual modesty; "ask Louisa, who has certainly the best taste in dress of any body I know."

"So Barbara leaves it to me to decide," said Louisa: "and I think Mrs. Tiffany's trimming will be very pretty; but let us have white *corsages*, *liserés* with red, to correspond."

"Mercy on us!" said old Dinah: "lizard corsets! what may they be?"

“Dinah,” said Mrs. Penelope, “my niece means bound with satin: these are newfangled terms, which puzzle those, who, like you and me, do not mix much in the world.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Tiffany, “I think these same white satin bodices will be very pretty, and quite consistent-like, provided there be no points.”

“Be comforted, Mrs. Tiffany,” said Louisa; “there shall be no points, I have determined, though I know it will break poor Eloise’s heart to be so unfashionable; but, for the good people at Merton, it will do very well, I dare say.”

The next few days were passed at Bishop’s-Court in perfect tranquillity. Barbara was always happy in the society of her two friends, but her present visit to them was particularly agreeable. However occupied the two young men were during the mornings, they always dined and spent their evenings with the family

party. Both were, of course, highly elated with the agreeable and unexpected incident of the election. Lionel was greatly flattered by the daily marks he received of affectionate attachment from his father's old tenants, as well as of general regard from the whole neighbourhood, which, together with the kind friendship shown him by good old Mr. Mildmay and all his family, inspired him with a degree of gaiety he had not known for many years. Might there not also be another cause still more powerful than any we have described?—We will not deny it. Miss Birmingham's character was one peculiarly calculated to please him; she was so truly feminine, so formed for tenderness and love, so all that a man could wish for in a partner of wedded life—all that in his dreams he had ever fancied as the greatest comfort of existence.

In short, before the week was over he was desperately in love; and Barbara!—why, she thought him the most agreeable, the most amia-

ble, and by far the most handsome man she had ever seen.

“ *Amor, potente Amor!* ”

Louisa had ascertained that Lord George Fitzallan was really at Norbury—was really to attend the election ball, so she too was perfectly happy.—And Julia ! was also happy in her own way. She rejoiced in the happiness of those around her.

CHAPTER VIII.

A VISIT.

“ At Timon’s villa let us pass a day,
Where all cry out, ‘ What sums are thrown away ! ’ ”

POPE.

NOTHING more of consequence occurred at Bishop’s-Court till the Sunday, when the whole party attended divine service at the Minster ; after which, Mr. Mildmay proposed that they should drive to the Abbey, to call on Lady Birmingham,—a peace-offering visit. Barbara’s countenance fell immediately, and Julia saw that she would rather not be of the party. She guessed from her knowledge of her friend’s sen-

sitive disposition, how much it would annoy her to be present at the first meeting between her mother and Colonel Montague. Julia's quick perception saw and felt all this in its proper light, and she determined to spare Barbara this pain. As she was to return to Atherford Abbey after the ball on the Monday, there could be no necessity for her being of the party then ; Julia therefore proposed, that instead of going to see Lady Birmingham, they two should walk back to Bishop's-Court through the fields. Barbara caught at the proposal with delight ; and Godfrey immediately offered to accompany them, as there was nothing, he said, he abominated like morning visits.

The day was so fine, that even old Mr. Mildmay proposed opening the landau. As Louisa shook hands with Barbara at parting, she brought the colour into her cheeks, by saying, " Foolish girl ! to leave me for so many hours to make the *agréable* to this same *militaire*,

this popular representative. Oh ! Barbara, you will never know the world." She would have said more, but Lionel seized her hand to help her in: Mr. Mildmay followed, and Lionel jumped in last. The old blacks set off at a brisk pace, along the well-filled streets of the borough of Merton.

"Lionel," said Louisa, "you had better go without your hat at once, for, if you are to bow to all these people, you will never have done. But now you must prepare for your most obsequious ceremonious politeness, for we shall have to pass Lord Mordaunt himself:—there his Lordship stands in full dignity, surrounded by his *officiers supérieurs*: he looks just as if he were holding a court martial."

The carriage stopped, and Lord Mordaunt advanced. "Good morning, Miss Louisa," bowing low; then lower still, to Mr. Mildmay, "My dear Sir, your most obedient;" then with a hand held out to Lionel, "Colonel Montague, how

are you this morning? not the worse, I hope, for all our festivities the other night. You stood your fatiguing honours well, my good friend; for popularity is a most boring thing, and I give you my word, you will find politics *un chien de métier*."

"We are going to call on Lady Birmingham," said Mr. Mildmay; "I fear her conscience somewhat reproaches her, and Lionel wishes every thing to be forgotten. Would your Lordship do us the honour to accompany us?"

"The pleasure of such society would half tempt me, I own," said Lord Mordaunt; "but unfortunately we had Lady Birmingham at Norbury last week, and I am afraid I have heard all her ladyship's last intelligence, from her body-coachman to her second head coachman, through all the gradations of grooms, till at last, through the third helper, it penetrated to so insignificant a personage as your humble

servant. Really one is not always *en train* for that sort of thing ; the acting listener is sometimes rather an *ennuyeuse* business, unless one has all one's notes of admiration ready. I have seen all the new varieties of Deccan Ericas, some hundreds, I was told ; I have admired all the contributions from the Cape and West Indies ; I have visited the aquarium or aquatium, and looked at the water lilies, and seen the museum full of such nameless wonders, not of specimens of the *beau idéal*, but certainly of the *idéal beau*. Unless you have done all this, you really hardly know what you are going to undertake," said his lordship, with a sort of faint, faded smile. " I have undergone it all. However, you will be fortified with the luncheon ; she will feed you well ; that French cook of her's knows what he is about : and she has some capital wine too. The Baronet is returned home, but that, of course, you know ; however, one never thinks of him in any way, poor man !

Yet really now, after all I have said, I must finish by allowing that Lady Birmingham is a most chatty, agreeable person, full of knowledge and conversation. You will say every thing that is proper and kind from me,—*au revoir*.—You mean to honour the ball to-morrow, Miss Louisa, I hope. Montague, of course, is the hero of the day. It will be a confounded bore ; but one must submit to such duties sometimes, to please the mob. By the by, too, we have an old Paris friend of your's staying with us, who is very anxious to have the honour of seeing you again."

Fortunately, old Mr. Mildmay was a little deaf, and Lord Mordaunt always spoke in a melancholy, minor tone, half *sotto voce* ; but the young lady felt her cheeks tingle, for she was aware that her *vis-à-vis* both heard and understood ; she dropped her eyes to avoid seeing his significant and most provoking smile.

" But I beg pardon for detaining you," said

Lord Mordaunt, as he shook hands again with Lionel, and walked back to his military circle.

The carriage drove on a second time.

“How I hate that man’s supercilious coldness !” said Louisa : “his hatred of all the world almost reconciles one to Lady Birmingham’s love of herself and her belongings.”

“Take care, my dear,” said Mr. Mildmay, archly, “lest your dislike of Lord Mordaunt should make you too partial to our neighbour at the Abbey.”

“Well, my dear Sir, I should never have expected any thing so satirical from you. There is certainly not much to choose between them. Why, Lionel, how silent you are grown ! Are you making a sonnet to your mistress’ eyebrows ? Oh ! but I guess it all now ; we are approaching the paternal wood.

‘I mourn, O ye woodlands, I mourn but for you !’”

“Fie, Louisa,” said Mr. Mildmay, “it

is really a pity, my love, that you should have so little sentiment."

The carriage now turned from a shady lane upon a picturesque part of the common, where small clumps of natural beech gave a very forest-like appearance to the scene.

"This is that eternal Horsely Common," said Louisa; "the enclosure of which occupies every body but me."

"But you would not enclose this part, surely," said Lionel: "it would be high treason against taste. I always thought this one of the sweetest spots I know."

"Is it?" said the young lady, letting her lively eyes wander round the lovely landscape. "I don't pretend to understand any thing about the picturesque, not I; animated nature for me, if you please."

The grand entrance to Atherford Park now appeared in sight. There was a highly orna-

mented stone archway, with a Gothic lodge on either side. The road descended very abruptly through a wood of most superb trees, the shade of which, in summer, was so thick as to be almost gloomy. The noise of the carriage roused the deer from their hiding-places, and troops of them were seen crossing the glade at the bottom of the hill. The road there turned abruptly, and, emerging from the wood, presented a magnificent view of the river Ather. The park rose in a gentle ascent on the other side, at the top of which, and amid a grove of noble oaks, the ivy-covered Abbey raised its venerable front.

“It is, indeed, a beautiful spot,” said Lionel, with one of those deep sighs which a view of this beloved scene always drew from him: “what noble trees!”

“And such variety of them,” said Mr. Mildmay; “nothing can have a finer effect than

those tall firs behind the old building ; their sombre hue contrasts so well with the oaks, when these last are in full leaf."

"There is my favourite old elm," said Lionel. "I have often sat under it, to admire the view you catch through the branches, of the arch of the bridge."

"The turn your father made in the road here," said Mr. Mildmay, "was a great improvement ; the ascent used to be so very steep—such a pull for one's coach-horses. I remember his determining to do it ; it was just when the yeomanry were called out, during the French revolution, when first he raised his regiment."

This train of thought struck a melancholy chord, which reverberated its tone on Lionel. Both continued silent till they found themselves sweeping up to the great door ; another moment, and they stopped. The bell was rung, and a tribe of well-powdered lacqueys appeared to answer its call ; and as Louisa darted gaily

out of the carriage, she said, "Now for the living figures, to animate the landscape."

After crossing the Gothic hall, and passing by the carved old oak staircase, they were shown into a very fine dining-room, of noble dimensions, wainscotted with oak, and richly carved round the pannels. At a large table covered with every kind of delicacy, served in the richest china, sat Sir Benjamin and Lady Birmingham: he was a little insignificant-looking old man, with a very red face, and a tremendous pair of whiskers. Two footmen of very extraordinary height, in magnificent liveries, were waiting upon them; and a very important-looking butler was also in attendance. They both rose as the party entered; and Lady Birmingham advanced to meet her friends, in her most gracious manner.

"Then my eyes do not deceive me, and it is indeed my good old friend Mr. Mildmay, and Colonel Montague too, both come to pronounce

pardon for all my offences!—well, this is too generous:—and Miss Louisa blooming as usual. Colonel Montague, allow me to express how much I am flattered by this visit; in your own dear old Abbey you must be merciful, and promise to forgive all that is past,” and the lady affected to hide her face with her hand. “Sir Benjamin,” continued she, “let me present you to Colonel Montague, our landlord, I may say, and our new member for Merton.”

Sir Benjamin bowed sundry times, and stammered out something, but did not seem quite certain of his own meaning.

“Mr. Mildmay,” said Lady Birmingham, “do take the seat on this side the fire, that you may not feel any draught; you are just come in time for some excellent real Scotch hotchpodge, made by my own French cook, Rissolle. The Duke of Clanalpin thought it so good that he sent for the receipt last year.—Colonel Monta-

gue, let me give you some Swiss cabbage to the hotchpodge, it is an excellent mixture."

"And so you patronize *sour crout*?" said Mr. Mildmay.

"A sort of refinement upon it: I got the receipt from the Prince de Hougoumont's cook at Spa, but it must be made of *Chou de Milan* to be really good.—Miss Louisa, do you eat nothing? I fear you are still very delicate. Or are you for fruit?—allow me to recommend a Long-town pippin to you, or some of this Guava. My friend Admiral Buckeridge insisted on sending me something from abroad: he was going to America;—‘Oh, my good friend,’ said I, ‘send me some of those famous Long-town pippins:’ so behold, at Christmas arrived a cask of these very magnificent apples, directed to Lady Birmingham, Birmingham Abbey: and this Guava was sent me by the Admiral's son, who was stationed off the West Indies. Oh! and here is another rather uncommon fruit, a

Shadock,—let me cut you a slice, Colonel Montague,—sent me by a very particular friend, Governor O'Shawnassie, an old crony of Sir Benjamin's: he arrived from Barbadoes the other day, and sent me, by way of remembrance, some Shadocks and Cocoa-nuts. Would you like any Cocoa-nut?—Silvertop," addressing the butler, "why is not there some Cocoa-nut here?"

"I did not know your ladyship meant to have all the foreign fruit at luncheon," said Silvertop.

"My dear good lady," said Mr. Mildmay, "surely we have things enough:—all the rarities of the four quarters of the globe collected at luncheon is too much."

"Oh! we cannot have too many good things to give Colonel Montague a favourable idea of our proceedings at his Abbey."

Lionel bowed; he was much amused.

"But we must lionize Colonel Montague

about the grounds, so let us prepare for our walk. Silvertop, tell Sir Benjamin's own man to bring in his master's gaiters."

Silvertop obeyed, and re-entered presently, with a tall spruce elegant young gentleman, in silk stockings, who buttoned on Sir Benjamin's gaiters, and then gracefully withdrew.

"I think, my dear," said Lady Birmingham to her spouse, "you had better go in the donkey curriele, as you feel a little gouty this morning. Sir Benjamin has got two famous Spanish mules, which he enjoys vastly," said the lady, addressing Mr. Mildmay:—"and now, my good friend, will you mount Barbara's little Shetland pony, which I will answer for carrying you nicely?—or shall I drive you in my garden chair with my new grey ponies? I am so proud of my skill as a charioteer. Or suppose we were all to walk down to the bridge, the barouche landau with four horses could meet us there."

The last plan was thought the best, so the barouche and four was ordered.

“ Silvertop, tell the bailiff and the head-gardener to bring me each their master-keys ; and to be in attendance, in case I should want them. Tell Mr. Premium I shall audit some of the accounts this evening ; and he may direct some of the people who want to speak to me, to be here to-morrow morning at seven o'clock.”

“ I see you are as active as ever, my good lady,” said Mr. Mildmay.

“ Yes, my old friend ; activity is the soul of business. But it feels cold ; I think I had better put on my Greenland overall boots, my maid will be waiting with them up-stairs. Miss Louisa, will you show Colonel Montague the rooms ? I shall be down immediately.”

“ Oh, what a relief !” said Louisa ; “ but it is too ridiculous for me to pretend to show you the house : however, I must obey orders :— where shall we go ?”

“ Oh, I want to see my mother's picture.”

“ And to peep at the copy too, I dare say,” said she.

Lionel followed her through the drawing-room in silence, and stood for some minutes gazing at the much-loved features of his lamented parent. Louisa would not interrupt his melancholy musings. The piano was open, and she sat down to it, and almost mechanically sang those beautiful words of Moore's, in so plaintive a tone, that it quite touched Lionel's feelings:—

“ The harp that once through Tara's halls
The soul of music shed,
Now hangs as mute on Tara's walls,
As if that soul were fled.
So sleeps the pride of former days,
So glory's thrill is o'er ;
And hearts that once beat high for praise,
Now feel that thrill no more.”

“ Alas ! too true !” said Lionel half aloud, walking back to the drawing-room, that he

might look once again at all the old family portraits,—he seemed almost to be apostrophizing his ancestors.

“Quite sentimental, I protest!” said Lady Birmingham, entering at this moment, wrapped up something like a Russian bear. “Ah! Colonel Montague, I see what occupies you,—a sweet picture really, and vastly like, I am told; but you have not been in the library yet, and I want you to see my new bookcases. Your brother’s collection of books, I am told, is certainly very fine; quite choice in point of value, and learning, and all that sort of thing; but sadly deficient in books of light reading: those musty folios, you know, are really now quite out of vogue, so I have got a pretty collection of novels and light things from Colburns’, and some rose-wood cases for them, that do vastly well, and really are very ornamental.”

As no one could possibly admire such an addition to a fine, old, classical library, the

whole party were silent as they followed Lady Birmingham, who *ciceroned* the books, as she had before done the luncheon.

Louisa found an opportunity to whisper to Lionel—

“ In books, not authors, learned is my lady.”

And on another occasion, when Lady Birmingham exhibited a new edition of the *Almanach des Gourmands*, superbly bound, she said in a low voice to Lionel, “ How the shades of Aldus and Elzevir must blush to be degraded by such company !”

At length they were fairly through the house and in the pleasure-ground, where they found Mr. Mildmay and Sir Benjamin waiting for them in a superb little carriage, drawn by two splendid mules, who seemed too full of Spanish blood for the Baronet's powers as a charioteer.

Then came the exhibition of all the wonders of the horticultural art: the succession-houses,

Calcuttas, vineries, peacheries, and mushroom beds were shown off to admiration; but Lady Birmingham's chief powers were reserved for her new conservatory. Here her learning knew no bounds. The number of botanical names she remembered was certainly surprising; and if she applied some of them to wrong plants it did not much signify, for to the greater part of her listeners it mattered little whether the plant were an *orientalis* or an *occidentalis*; a *japonica* or a *vulgaris*; a major or a minor; a *prostrata* or a *spirens*; or whether the word were pronounced *erica* or *erica*. They were equally pleased in any way.

The flower-garden in front of the conservatory had been laid out by Lady Montague; and the various recollections which the sight of it brought back to Lionel's mind, prevented him from thoroughly enjoying all Lady Birmingham's absurdities. Not so, Louisa: she was delighted with the ridiculous in any shape, but in that of ignorant, purse-proud pomposity,

it was truly delicious—fair game, as she always said that Lady Birmingham was formed for the amusement of the rest of the world, and that the best part of her was, that she might be quizzed in the most open manner without ever finding it out.

The conservatory opened into a museum, containing fossils, shells, birds, insects, and all sorts of nameless curiosities—or, as Lord Mordaunt said, of the “*ideal beau*.” Lionel took up an odd-looking stone. “Oh, my dear Sir!” said Lady Birmingham, “have a care;” laying her hand upon his arm: “a most valuable relic, brought from the ruins of Troy by Professor Zink, supposed to come from Priam’s palace, the only specimen in England.”

“Lady Birmingham,” said Louisa, “what, in the name of wonder, can there be curious in that fine glass-case?”

“Where, where?” said her ladyship. “Oh! that dried nosegay; it is indeed, in my opinion, a most valuable curiosity. That dried *bouquet*

once adorned the bosom of the celebrated Madame Bertrand, who was so long at St. Helena with the great Napoleon. When he was off Plymouth, after he surrendered himself to Captain Maitland, my friends the Salvadors, of Mendoza Mount, in Devonshire, took a boat to have a view of the hero. They saw Madame Bertrand quite plainly, at the window of the cabin, and, with a telescope, they could even make out that she wore a coloured English muslin! Well, she was just finishing her toilette, and in a pique, as they supposed, she drew this *bouquet* from her bosom, and threw it into the sea; young Sampson Salvador had the good fortune to seize it, and sent it to me as a curiosity worthy of my museum."

This story almost overset Lionel's gravity.

"One sprig of myrtle," continued her ladyship, "unfortunately fell out, and was seized upon by one of the lieutenants, a young Arabin, but he happens to be very intimate with

my friends the Pettingalls, and Paulina Pettingall thinks she can procure it for me."

"A valuable relic, indeed," observed Lionel; obliged to say something in his own defence. "But pray what is there curious in this old walking-stick?"

"That stick," replied the lady, "belonged to the great Napoleon himself. He held it in his hand when he disembarked at St. Helena; but in a fit of abstraction—not much to be wondered at, poor man!—he let it fall, just as he landed, and it was picked up by a young captain in the navy, a godson of mine, one of the Staffordshire Whitemarshes: he was following in the imperial train, and he most kindly presented it to me on his return to England. I mean to have it topped with gold, and an inscription upon it, with a large bee extending its wings above."

"Well, I declare," said Louisa, "here is an old tooth."

"It is, indeed, my dear, neither more nor less than an old tooth, which my friend Professor Zink picked up at the tomb of Scipio, many years ago."

"Oh, my dear Lady Birmingham, do tell Colonel Montague the history of these queer portraits."

"They were given to me," said her ladyship, "by my favourite Mirza Hassan Khan, the famous Persian Ambassador. They are undoubted portraits of the present royal family of Persia, and were intended to be given to the British Museum; but I entreated to have them, and his excellency would not refuse me."

"I think," said Lionel, "the Persian artists rather fail in perspective and proportion."

"To say nothing of colouring," said Louisa.

"Oh, you unmerciful critics; but, in the infancy of the arts, one must make some allowance."

"Oh, certainly," said Lionel, "as well as in the infancy of taste." This speech procured him a smile from Louisa.

The curricule with the two mules now drove up. Mr. Mildmay took leave of Sir Benjamin, and called out to the young people that they must be thinking of home, if they meant to have any dinner.

Lady Birmingham was much disappointed: she had not shown them half she intended. She accompanied her friends to the bridge, where Mr. Mildmay had ordered his carriage to meet him, and where the splendid barouche and four was also in attendance—the body coachman on the box, two fashionable-looking footmen in the dicky behind. “How cruel,” cried Lady Birmingham, “to leave me to take my solitary drive round the grounds! However, I shall go and see my plantations, and take my head gardener and my steward in the carriage with me. It will save time. Is Sir Benjamin’s groom coming to drive the mules?”

“He will be here directly, my lady.”

“I shall be glad to have him, my dear,” said

Sir Benjamin; "for dish me if these confounded mules are not very restive!"

Mr. Mildmay and his party got into their carriage. "I leave Barbara entirely to your care, my dear Sir, for to-morrow night," said her ladyship. "The carriage shall be sent to bring her home.—Good b'ye, Miss Louisa, hope you will have plenty of dancing. Pray tell your sister how delighted I am that Mr. Mildmay has given his consent to her accompanying us to town. I suppose Barbara got all her things the other day. Tiffany was here a long time. Good morning to you all; you will have a sweet drive home."

"Lionel," said Louisa, 'as they drove off, "surely you ought to give this show-lady something for the sight of all her fine things!"

The carriage drove swiftly down the Park. When they were approaching the lodge, Mr. Mildmay turned to Colonel Montague, "Well," said he, "now tell me what you think of Sir Benjamin and Lady Birmingham."

“Sad representations, indeed, of my poor father and mother, Sir,” said Lionel.

“They certainly do not remind one of them ; but perhaps you think the daughter makes some amends for the folly of her parents.”

“Poor Miss Birmingham !” returned Colonel Montague, “she is, indeed, of a very different order of beings.”

“Their purse-proud folly,” said Mr. Mildmay, “is quite laughable. I have often thought it a proof how little store Providence sets by wealth, that it should be so frequently bestowed on those who make a very contemptible use of it : but the poet has justly observed, on this sort of lavish expenditure—

‘Yet hence the poor are clothed, the hungry fed ;
Health to himself, and to his infants bread,
The labourer bears : what his hard heart denies,
His charitable vanity supplies.’

“I think Lady Birmingham will never succeed in spoiling her daughter’s amiable dis-

position. Poor girl! she will have hard cards to play."

"Hard cards, my dear Sir!" said Louisa: "Do you call being heiress to 20,000*l.* a-year hard cards? I only wish I had such a hand dealt me."

"She will be exposed to innumerable dangers," replied Mr. Mildmay, "and who will advise her?"

"Oh! but she will find plenty of counsellors, I doubt not."

"Yes, my dear, and I have great hopes in the natural steadiness of Barbara's disposition. Were it you, Louisa, I should not feel half so secure."

"Oh, fie! Papa; but you are so severe upon your poor Louisa."

"I have a much better opinion of Sir Benjamin," continued the old gentleman, "than most people have: he is weak and ridiculous, and suffers her ladyship to treat him like a per-

fect baby, but he is a kind-intentioned man at the bottom ; his heart is in the right place, and if he had not been cursed with such immense wealth, he would have passed unnoticed through the world, and his follies would never have been brought into play. Not so, my lady : she might have been less palpably absurd, but her heart would have been still the same. I shall always say, ‘ Good Lord ! deliver me from Lady Birmingham ! ’ ”

CHAPTER IX.

THE BALL.

Avaunt ! I shake thee from me, Care ;
The gay, the youthful, and the fair,
From " Lodge," and Court," and " House,"
and " Hall,"
Are hurrying to th' election ball.

ETONIAN.

THE important night at length arrived when all the *beau monde* of the borough of Merton and its vicinity, were to be assembled to celebrate Colonel Montague's election.

The abigails at Bishop's-Court succeeded to admiration in their labours : Miss Parry had provided all that was necessary ; Mademoiselle Eloise exerted all her Parisian taste, and even

Mrs. Dinah allowed that the ball-dresses were remarkably pretty.

The party made their *entrée* into the ball-room just in proper time, though Louisa said they were so dreadfully early that there was not a creature to speak to, and yet the room was already half full ; but as Lady Norbury had condescended to be the patroness of the ball, in compliment to Colonel Montague, of course the dancing could not commence till her ladyship was present. “ We shall not be able to escape a single civility,” said she. “ Do look at the chandelier ! what an apology of a thing ! why the room is darkness visible.”

The *distingués* of the neighbourhood, of course, were not yet arrived, since Fashion has oddly enough decreed that unpunctuality is a sign of good breeding ; and that to be early any where, is a proof you must be nobody.

The ball, of course, could not commence till the arrival of the Norbury party, but they

were always "the latest of the late." However the fashionables were beginning to drop slowly in. "Now, ladies! you must tell me who all the people are," said Lionel; "for you know I am such a stranger here I shall hardly recollect any one. Who are these just coming in? A fine looking woman the mother, and the daughters are smart at least, if not handsome."

"How angry they would be," said Louisa, "if they heard you; for Lady Margaret Carlton thinks her daughters beauties of the first class. She is the wife of our archdeacon."

"Oh! Dr. Carlton,—I remember he used often to be at the Abbey, but I did not recollect he was married."

"A proof you have not seen much of him, for he is always saying 'when the Duke of Clanalpin did me the honour to give me his eldest daughter in marriage.' One day Captain O'Brian answered, 'Ay, my dear Sir, and he would have given her to you had she been

twice as old.' And the best of it was, that the Duke did not give her to Dr. Carlton; he ran off with her. He is a *cadet* of a good family;

‘ Not over-weighty in the purse,
But many ladies have done worse.’

However, as her ladyship is related to every right honourable north of the Tweed, she treats Dr. Carlton and his connexions with infinite scorn.”

“ What very beautiful gowns the Miss Carltons have got on,” said Barbara.

“ Oh, they are always *tirées à quatre épingles*; her ladyship is a capital manager, and intends them to make smart wives to men of small fortune. I dare say she will tell Lionel so the moment he is introduced; and then, if we admire the dresses, we shall be told of the great effect they produced at the last Almack’s.”

“ I think, Barbara,” said Julia, “ that we ought to go up to Lady Margaret, to enquire after Dr. Carlton.”

“ Now that is so like Julia,” said Louisa, “ because, surely, as this ball is given on purpose to celebrate Colonel Montague’s election, we ought to sit still, and let the people come to us. Depend upon it, the moment Lady Margaret’s glass enables her to perceive us, she will come immediately to make pretty speeches, and to pounce upon our men for partners for her two misses. Now mark if she does not.”

“ You may stay here then with Lionel,” said Julia; “ but I dare say Barbara will go with me.”

“ Oh, that I will, with pleasure,” said Miss Birmingham, “ it is what I was wishing to do, only I had not courage to cross the room alone.”

“ Oh! by all means go then and do all the proprieties,” said Louisa, “ while I tell Lionel who is who, and every thing about every body. We shall have the Lady Margaret here presently; and now, Lionel, look, that is her charm-

ing son, the great dandy, Adolphus Frederic Carlton; no, you don't look right. See! that creature with all those under-waistcoats: he is godson to one of the royal Dukes, and is just gone into the Guards. Now he will be presented to Barbara; that is what Lady Margaret will call a good hit; but I hope he won't ask her to dance the first set. But I suppose, of course, Lionel, you have engaged her."

"For the second I have," said Colonel Montague, "but I am told I must open the ball with Lady Anne Norbury; that it will be expected: so I hold myself in readiness for that honour."

"Oh! and then if Lord Mordaunt can exert himself so far as to dance, I suppose he will take out one of the Lady Beaulieu's; for I hear they are coming. Then who will Barbara dance with the first set?—let's see! Oh! I have it now; she shall dance with Lord George

Fitzallan. I used often to make him dance with whomever I pleased formerly, so I think I shall be able to manage that."

"And are you sure you will wish it, Louisa?" said Lionel, looking steadfastly at her. "There was a time when I think you would have been very angry if Lord George had danced with any one but yourself the first dance, I remember."

"Oh, those times are past," interrupted Louisa, with an endeavour to appear unconcerned. "Lord George Fitzallan at Merton, among the high set from Norbury, and making his *début* under my wing at Paris, are quite two different people."

"I cannot make you out," said Lionel, thoughtfully. "I wonder what Caroline would say were she here?"

"Oh, she would say that an election-ball in England is not half so gay a thing as a *fête de village* in dear France; and she would say true."

“ Ah !” said Lionel, shaking his head reproachfully at her. “ Paris has spoilt you both : she has married a foreigner, so it does not signify ; but you, Louisa ! who are to live in this country, you would have been much happier had you never gone abroad.”

“ *Mais changeons de sujet* : leave my *beau* for your *belle*.—Pray observe Barbara shaking hands with all those vulgar-looking people : with what joy she greets that gawky red-faced girl in that odious *jardinière* !—how can she have such disgraceful cronies ! Oh ! I see ; it is that stupid Miss Barlow, the daughter of the curate at Atherford.”

“ How strange it is,” said Lionel, “ that I admire her for the very thing which excites your displeasure : it is that genuine good-heartedness, that real simplicity of character, which makes her so interesting a person, much more than her beauty.”

“ Very true, my good philosopher ; but it

was her good looks, her soft complexion, and loving eyes, which made you first take the trouble to hunt out all these excellencies of heart and charms of mind. Trust you all for that; you moral men always select angel forms. Now do you think mental perfection, with a red nose or a humped back, would ever catch you? So your tirades about intellect and virtue always go with me for nothing—mere humbug; and that is what rules all the world.”

Lionel could not help laughing.

“See!” continued this lively rattle, “I was quite right in my prediction. Here comes the stately Lady Margaret Carlton herself, on Godfrey’s arm, under pretence of enquiring after a cold and sore throat which I sported as a good excuse to escape a dull dinner at Dean’s Mount last week, but really to be introduced to you. The daughters are following, arm-in-arm, which looks affectionate and picturesque. Apollonia, the eldest, is pulling up her swan-

like neck, that you may admire it; and Charlotte Augusta, the old Queen's god-daughter, is smiling from ear to ear, to show off her most beautiful white teeth. Now for it!—here they come!”

The party advanced just as Louisa described. Lady Margaret expressed the greatest pleasure that her young friend was able to come to the ball. They had all regretted her absence the other day so much. Then came the most feeling enquiries after the species of sore throat she had been suffering from, followed by a recommendation of certain pectoral lozenges, which were quite infallible. All the time her ladyship was speaking to Louisa, she was casting side-glances at Colonel Montague. The Miss Carltons shook hands most cordially with their “dear friend,” and then echoed all their mamma's hopes and fears.

Louisa was suddenly seized with a violent fit of coughing; then she seemed to feel a

draught of air, and so must cross her shawl, but yet contrived to show off all the border; then again the room was "*quite insufferably hot*, those odious lamps!" and so she fanned away at a great rate, in order to exhibit a new French fan.

Lady Margaret was grieved to see her so indifferently,—really quite distressed;—coughs and sore throats were sometimes dangerous;—and then she paused a moment, in doubt how to proceed.

Godfrey had left the party, notwithstanding the Miss Carltons' inviting looks for him to remain. Louisa was repressing an inclination to laugh; Lionel waited in immoveable gravity. Lady Margaret at length, with decided courage, faced to the right-about, and gave one momentary sharp glance. She was satisfied. "Colonel Montague, I believe?"

Lionel bowed assent.

She extended her hand most graciously. "My

dear Sir, you must allow me to consider myself one of your oldest friends, for I knew you well in petticoats : charmed, I assure you, we all are, to see you once again in this neighbourhood. Such an unexpected happiness to have a Montague for our new member ! Give me leave to present you to my girls, who have heard so much of you all their lives. Apollonia, Charlotte Augusta,—Colonel Montague. I must enquire after your sister too ; I remember her such a sweet pretty creature. Whom was it she married ? Some foreigner, I was told."

" The Baron de Wallestein."

" What ! the new Austrian ambassador ?"

" The same."

" You don't say so !—well this is delightful ! Only think, my dears," said her ladyship, turning to her daughters : our favourite Baron is Colonel Montague's brother-in-law. When he was in England, some years ago, we were so intimate with him ! He was always at

my brother's, the Duke of Clanalpin's; went into Scotland to shoot grouse with him at Mac Ivor Tower, where we met him;—not Charlotte Augusta, however; it was long before she came out,—but Apollonia knew him vastly well."

"Oh, it was years before my time, mamma," said Miss Charlotte Augusta, rather indignantly; "but you always do make me out so old."

"True, my poor girl; but Apollonia, my love, you must remember the Baron de Wallestein well, he was so good as always to admire your singing."

"Yes, mamma, and I used always to waltz with him, after the French play at the Argyle-rooms; and then he often rode with pa and me, in Hyde Park.

"Pray remember us all to the dear Baron when you next write to him, for he was such a favourite with us formerly," said Lady Margaret. "And I hope we shall see you at

Dean's Mount, during your stay in this neighbourhood, Colonel Montague. The Archdeacon is laid up with the gout, or, I assure you, he would have made a point of coming to-night to pay his respects to you. He charged me with his excuses, and begs you will fix a time when we may hope to see you." Then turning suddenly to Louisa, "How late the Norburys are! though, to be sure, that is nothing new: only to-night, as Lady Norbury is patroness, they might have condescended to be punctual, one would think. Lady Birmingham, of course, will not be here; but I met her daughter just now, with Miss Mildmay. Never saw Miss Birmingham look so well; really she is grown a fine girl. Considering all things, one cannot but wonder where she got her manner. I hear, she dances shockingly; has no ear whatever: never could be made to go in time, though she has had both Monsieur and Madame Guillet two winters."

“Mamma, mamma!” exclaimed Miss Carlton, “Lord Beaulieu is bowing to you; and all the three Lady Beaulieus are come, I protest!”

“Well, I declare, if it is not too provoking!” said Miss Charlotte Augusta; “Lady Agnes told me only yesterday, that they should certainly wear blue barege gowns, and now they have put on pink; see how they cut us out: how tiresome!”

“Are you acquainted with the Lady Beaulieus?” said Lady Margaret Carlton to Louisa.

“Not in the least, I never saw them before; I did not know they ever came to Etheringham Castle to stay.”

“Oh, this is the first time since that sad affair of the mother’s, that they have really settled themselves there. Poor Lord Beaulieu could not bear the house for a long time. But I suppose, now these three girls are come out, he has got tired of watering-places. What do you think of them? pray speak your mind ho-

nestly ; for though we are cousins, and such near neighbours, there is no love lost between us."

" Surely," said Louisa, " they are all three very striking, fine-looking girls ; and one, the tallest, very beautiful !"

" Oh, that is Lady Madelina, the youngest. But wait till you see them by daylight ; their complexions won't stand that test. Now there is such a difference in skins," continued Lady Margaret : " my Apollonia, who looks so pale to-night, you know what a sweet colour she has in a morning. That sharp little one with the light hair, that is Lady Olivia ; she sets up for accomplishments, and all that sort of thing, which never takes, you know," said her Ladyship, with a sentimental tone. " The next to her, with that high colour and those plump cheeks, is Lady Agnes : handsome I can never call her ; she looks like a chubby milkmaid ; she fancies herself a wit, because she says every

thing that comes into her head. Then the dashing Lady Madelina — she can talk of nothing but Almack's. Poor Lord Beaulieu ! he is certainly much to be pitied : I think he looks very melancholy ; I wonder whether he will marry again ?”

“ Mamma,” said Miss Carlton, “ don't speak so loud ; Lord Beaulieu is close to you ; he is coming up to speak to you.”

Lady Margaret turned round, and paid her compliments to his lordship. He was a fine-looking man, about fifty, with something grave, perhaps austere, in his countenance, but his manner was particularly good.

“ Louisa,” whispered Lionel, “ who is this Lord Beaulieu ? I have taken a great fancy to his look.”

“ He is a Roman Catholic peer,” answered she, “ with a large property in this neighbourhood. He was divorced some years ago from his wife : it was a sad business ; and he never could

bear Etheringham Castle from that time. Till very lately, it has always been let. The Egertons used to live there when you were at Atherford; but last year Lord Beaulieu returned with his family: however, he went no where—this is his first public appearance in the county. The Archdeacon's place, Dean's Mount, is close to Etheringham; but report says the two families do not agree well, though they are related. Well, I wonder when Julia and Barbara will return. I think they must have shaken hands with every old woman in the room, and, upon my word, there is a plentiful collection. Dear! what a tiresome ball this is! not a man appears, and such a tribe of ugly, awkward, ill-dressed women keep pouring in. When will the Norburys come?"

"When will the Norburys come?" was the exclamation of many an anxious young lady that night.

Lord Beaulieu and his daughters now came

up, with Miss Birmingham and Miss Mildmay; Godfrey had presented them, and Julia had introduced "her sister Louisa." The peer said something very civil, and then walked away to converse with Mr. Mildmay, who was a very old acquaintance.

The young ladies remained in a knot together.

"You live near here, don't you?" said Lady Agnes, speaking very fast to Louisa.

"Yes; only three miles off."

"Oh, - at a sweet old house!" said Lady Madelina, "covered with ivy: quite a romantic spot: and Bishop's-Court too, such a Gothic-sounding name! I should doat on it."

"We have never," said Lady Agnes, interrupting her sister, "been at Etheringham before last year, since we were children; and then it was Christmas time, and it was so cold and comfortless I did not like the country at all;—

nobody came to see us but the Carltons. Are they friends of yours?"

"I am very well acquainted with them," said Louisa.

"Oh! of course; but you are not bosom-friends, I see, and I hope they are not especial favourites; for, between ourselves, I cannot bear them. Lady Margaret is so grand and consequential, because she is a Duke's daughter, and treats us all *du haut en bas*; as if I would not have been a Duke's daughter too, if I could. And then the girls, they are so stiff and stupid! Now, why do you laugh? Oh! I dare say you think me a prodigious rattle,—that is quite my character; I always say every thing I think to every body. Don't you?"

"Not always," replied Louisa.

"Dear! you looked so merry and good-natured, I fancied you were a chatterbox too. That is your sister talking to Olivia; and who is that tall young lady, dressed the same as you

are? Papa introduced me, but I did not catch her name."

"Miss Birmingham, of Atherford Abbey."

"She is a great heiress, is not she? And her mother is a huge, fat, vulgar woman, whom every body laughs at."

Louisa could not deny it.

"But I have been told," continued her ladyship, "that Lady Birmingham means to give very fine balls; so I hope to goodness I shall get to be acquainted with her. I shall not mind her vulgarity, if she will but invite me to her grand fêtes; for I am so fond of balls. Madelina and I are only just come out; Olivia was presented last year. Do you know, I was so afraid this ball would have been on a Friday; because we are Catholics, you know, and papa would not have let us come of course, which would have been a bore. You are not a Catholic, I hope?"

Louisa satisfied her on that head.

"Oh, I was afraid, if you were, that you

might think what I said was odd. Do you know, we have got an Italian governess,—such a beautiful creature !”

“ Have you indeed !”

“ Yes, and her name is the Countess Roselli. When we were at the Castle last year, the countess was not with us, but papa’s aunt, Lady Theresa, came to take care of us. Do you know her ?”

“ No, I have not that honour.”

“ Oh, I believe you would not think it any honour at all ; she is a stiff, starched old maid ; so cross and particular ! Oh ! I hope to heaven I shall not be an old maid.”

“ I should think your ladyship was not in any danger,” said Louisa, laughing.

Meanwhile the two other Lady Beaulieus were talking equally fast to Miss Mildmay and Miss Birmingham.

“ What a handsome man Colonel Montague is !” said Lady Olivia ; “ I thought all members of Parliament were sure to be ugly.”

“That is rather too sweeping a clause,” said Julia.

“Well, I am sure all those I have seen before were. As he is staying in the house with you, I suppose he is your beau?”

“No, indeed, I cannot lay claim to him.”

“Oh, then he must be your sister's, I am sure.”

“Your ladyship is quite mistaken again.”

“Oh, now I have it, then he must be Miss Birmingham's;” and she went up to Barbara, and, tapping her with her fan, she said: “Well, Miss Birmingham, so this handsome Colonel Montague is your beau; I have just discovered it after three guesses, and, this time, Miss Mildmay does not deny my being right; I admire your choice very much.”

Poor Barbara looked sadly disconcerted, and hardly knew what to say, till Julia came to her aid.

“But, Lady Olivia,” said she, “you have

taken for granted that you guessed right, because I said nothing. But now I must beg you will guess again, for you are quite out, I can tell you."

"Dear, how provoking! well, I don't care whose beau he is, so that he don't fancy either of the Miss Carltons. I don't want them to be married before me. Oh! I dare say he admires Lady Anne Norbury. Do you?"

"I think her very handsome, certainly."

"'Fashionable, with a fine air,' as papa says."

Lady Madelina's voice was now heard catechising Barbara. "What loves of dresses you have all got on, Miss Birmingham! I hope you do not like the Miss Carltons' dingy pink?" Agnes settled to put on these, on purpose to annoy them, because they always think every thing they have superior to other people's. You are just coming out, I think? Are you seventeen?"

"Yes, last month," said Barbara.

"Oh ! then you have just the start of me ; my birthday is next week. Shall you like going to Almack's, do you think ?"

"I cannot tell, till I have been there."

"Pray, are you on any Lady Patroness's book, Miss Birmingham ?"

"Indeed, I don't know."

"Dear ! how very odd, not to know ; why, you will be sure to be thrown out, I can tell you, if you don't make haste to apply : and that would be so very shocking, the first year you come out ; you would never be the fashion afterwards ! You must try and be introduced directly to Lady Hauton."

"Madelina," said Lady Olivia, "don't talk so loud : here is papa."

"Oh, then I must be mum," said Lady Madelina, "for, I can tell you, he is so very particular and strict, that we are all like mutes before him."

Lord Beaulieu advanced, in a grave, solemn

manner ; the young ladies drew up their heads, while his lordship expressed his thanks to the Miss Mildmays, for the kind notice they were so good as to take of his three little mad-caps, as he was pleased to call his daughters.

“ Thank God ! here are the Norbury party,” said several voices at once. “ I hear a carriage ; don’t you ?”

“ No ! it is only the wind, or the mail coming in, I am afraid. Yet see ! I believe you are right ; Mr. Mayor has left his seat, and is going to the door.”

In like manner as on the stage a flourish of trumpets proclaims the approach of royalty, so in a few minutes did the general buz of satisfaction, which went round the assembly, announce to every one that the illustrious party were indeed arrived. Great was the general anxiety for their *entrée*. The dancers were all longing to be in motion, they had waited so long. The chaperons were equally desirous to

be rid of their charges, that they might relieve their minds at cards—they were all so cold ! The carpet and fire in the card-room would be so comfortable !

The folding doors were at length thrown open. The Mayor advanced with all proper solemnity, to receive the distinguished visitors. Every head was turned towards the door; every eye was strained to catch the first glimpse.

Lady Norbury, as erect as usual, and most magnificently attired, entered first, leaning on the arm of her son, Lord Mordaunt. He looked bilious to a degree, but no ways interesting: his black hair combed straight over his forehead; his coat closely buttoned up to the very top, and finishing with a black cravat; his tall, perpendicular figure drawn up to its full length; his very look an antidote to mirth.

Next followed the Lady Anne, radiant in beauty, and conscious that she was so: her costume was fanciful in the extreme, but dis-

played her charms to full perfection, and her dress was set off to advantage by her commanding figure. She was on her father's arm, who never looked so happy as when attended by his beautiful daughter. The Earl was yet a fine-looking man; he wore the uniform of the Merton Hunt, and over it the blue ribbon was extended at full breadth. His lordship carried himself with a certain stateliness of demeanour, as if conscious

“That every eye was fix'd on him alone.”

There was a gracious smile, which he bestowed first to the right and then to the left; for his earnest endeavour was never to offend any one.

Next in the train of nobility followed Miss Molyneux, to whom no sight was ever so pleasing as the snowy shoulders of Lady Anne Norbury: she leant on the arm of Captain Cole, of the Fourth Dragoons, a very smart dandy little man, and a prodigious favourite at Norbury.

Miss Maria Molyneux was perfectly happy, too, for she was attended by Sir Edward Barington: he was rather gouty, to be sure, but he managed wonderfully with a walking-stick, and the fair Maria only wished she could have him thus for ever.

Lord George Fitzallan, all life and spirit, as usual, escorted the portly Mrs. Metcalf. She was arrayed in a bright pea-green satin, and was shaking her fat sides with laughter at some of his good jokes. As he led her up the room, he shook hands with many of his election friends: he was delighted to see them all again.

Last of all appeared the Abbé Le Blanc, and Miss Bevil: she was all *rouge*, feathers, and flowers, a most fantastic-looking old maid, who believed herself to be the very pink of Parisian taste. She was talking French very loud, to make the natives stare, and the Abbé bowing very low at all the good things she said, and

carrying her shawl over his arm with much gallantry.

Beaux now poured in from all quarters. First came a party of Dragoons, whose splendid uniforms had a prodigious effect. Next arrived the jolly Captain O'Brian, of the Navy, with a party of gentlemen belonging to the Merton Hunt, who had dined together at the Wellington arms, and who had only waited for the arrival of the Norburys to make their appearance. The joy of all the young ladies was now at its height. So many men! and plenty of officers! Such a certainty of good partners! Quite delightful!

Lady Norbury and Lady Anne were all graciousness to the Miss Mildmays. The Earl was much struck with Miss Birmingham's beauty. He paid her so many compliments, that Louisa thought he must mean to ask her to dance:—she longed for such an exhibition. It would be

excellent to see Lord Norbury's rectangular steps.

"Must I, then?" said Lady Anne, with most becoming modesty, when Lionel requested the honour of her hand; "are we to lead the way?"

"I believe it will be expected."

They stood up for an English country-dance. Lady Anne called the Merton Hunt, which Mr. Bell, the organist, had composed for the occasion, and dedicated to her ladyship. It was expected that Lord Mordaunt would have followed with Miss Birmingham; but his Lordship was in a bad humour, on account of the non-appearance of the Sydenham family. "What the devil can have happened at Elsinore Lodge?" said he to Lady Olivia Beaulieu. She began a long history of a cold Mrs. Sydenham had caught in an open carriage; and, in the middle of it, Lord Mordaunt took her by the hand, and led her to the line of dancers. Lord Norbury was much dis-

pleased with his son's choice : he had hoped it would have been Miss Birmingham.

Godfrey Mildmay took out Lady Madelina ; Mr. Sutton, the Recorder, Miss Mildmay ; Captain Cole stood up with Miss Molyneux ; the Miss Carltons were accommodated with a brace of dragoons. Lady Margaret tried in vain to persuade Adolphus Frederic to ask Miss Birmingham ; the youth was restive—he would play *à l'écarté*,—" he would be hanged rather than dance, that he would !" A tribe of Merton Misses followed in line, the music began, and all was animation.

Lord George Fitzallan, having got rid of Mrs. Metcalf, and anxious to escape Miss Maria Molyneux, came sauntering up towards a bench, on which were seated Louisa, Barbara, and Lady Agnes Beaulieu. He started in good earnest at the sight of Louisa. " Heavens !" exclaimed he, " Miss Mildmay ! is it possible ?
- My old Paris friend ?"

“The very same,” replied Louisa, gaily: “I can assure you, I am equally surprised; but you have changed your regiment since we last met, so I little expected to find an old acquaintance in the Major of the Fourth Dragoons.”

“I hope that is the only thing you will find me changed in,” said he, laughing; “and I think I shall find you the same lively saucy creature you used to be:—as handsome, I see you are,” added he in a whisper, to be heard by her alone.

Louisa smiled most graciously.

“And can you be thus sitting still, while all the world are moving? You, who dance so divinely? How shocking! but this must not be any longer. Will you do me the honour to dance with me? and then we can talk over old Paris stories, and your dear friend the little Baroness.”

“What, I?” said Louisa, with an affected shrug of horror: “I join in a vulgar kitchen-

hop? No! never, never! while I have a hope of a waltz or quadrille."

"Ah, I see," said Lord George, "you are indeed the same: yes; the same whimsical creature you were, when you made me believe you were a French girl, at one of the Duke of Wellington's balls at Paris. Do you remember that?"

"To be sure I do: but don't suppose, my lord, I shall let you stay talking over old stories to me, when gentlemen are in such requisition. I have a friend here, who prefers English country-dances to French ones,—don't you, Barbara?—so allow me to present Lord George Fitzallan to you—he is dying to dance, and so are you; pray make him turn every couple."

"Cruel girl!" whispered Lord George; "but I will have my revenge for this piece of treachery. Will you dance the first quadrille with me."

"Yes, I promise you faithfully, I will."

“Then shall we join the set now?” said Lord George to Barbara.

“In one moment,” replied she; “but I must first get my sash arranged.”

Lady Agnes Beaulieu offered her services to assist her, and; while they retired to the tea-room, Lord George took the seat next Miss Louisa Mildmay. “I am in no hurry for them to come back,” said he; “I am better pleased as I am, next you, than dancing with any one here. But pray, fair lady, may I ask the name of my pretty, modest, retiring partner? You turned me off cleverly enough upon her. She is vastly well-dressed; but looks new, methinks, to this wicked dancing world of ours.”

“What! is it possible,” said Louisa, “that your lordship should not be acquainted with Miss Birmingham, of Atherford Abbey? You do surprise me, I own!”

“Birmingham? Birmingham? what the great, heiress?”

“ The same, and a very charming girl too, I assure you ; and a very particular friend of mine into the bargain.”

“ Well ! this is too good luck ; why, I vow I have heard of nothing but her thousands and tens of thousands since I have been at Norbury. The old peer, I believe, intends her for my precious cousin, Mordaunt ; and then my good aunt looks grand, and is seized with certain aristocratic qualms about blood and pedigree. Why, I have half a mind to fall down on my knees before you, Miss Mildmay, and declare myself yours until death, for this good turn.”

“ How ridiculous you are, Lord George ? and the best of the matter too is, that Miss Birmingham was at Norbury last week, and, as you were there, you must have seen her.”

“ Oh ! but there is always such a tribe of people at Norbury. I remember now hearing her name at dinner ; but in the evening I had

to make up Lord Norbury's whist-table, and all the ladies had retired before we broke up."

"Well, and the next morning at breakfast ;—surely you saw her then?"

"No! indeed I did not; for we all went out fox-hunting, long before any of the women were up, and, when we returned, my lady and her daughter had flown. I remember the mother perfectly: a sort of fat, portly woman, whose very looks proclaim how rich she is, and all the female coterie at Norbury were laughing at her, even to her face. But hush! here comes the young lady; now assist me all ye powers, to make myself agreeable; and you my kind Lady Patroness, pray make vows for my success."

"Why, you will frighten Miss Birmingham, if you are so strange. She is not used to such *persiflage*. I hope, Barbara, you will keep Lord George in order; he much wants it, I assure you."

Barbara laughed, and was handed to the dancers by his lordship.

“What a delightful merry person Lord George Fitzallan seems!” said Lady Agnes Beaulieu to Louisa: “he is one of the dragoons, is not he?”

“Yes, and nephew to Lady Norbury.”

“There is quite a crowd of officers there by the door, doing nothing but quizzing the company. Oh, how I wish some one of them would ask me to dance!” said Lady Agnes, sighing: “Do, dear Miss Mildmay, let us take a walk that way: I know Captain Buller, he dined at Etheringham the other day; perhaps he would ask me, or introduce somebody.”

“My dear Lady Agnes,” said Louisa, “walk after the men? oh, impossible! I could not do such a thing—no! indeed, they must come after us. But if you wish to move, we can take a turn in the card-room, or stand where we can see the dancers.”

“ Oh ! any thing is better than remaining in this stupid corner ; and I would rather look at the dancers than at all the old dowagers.”

The door of the ball-room was now thrown open with a certain air, and a beau of the first order lounged in with the most easy *nonchalance*. Dandy is too vulgar a term to apply to this hero ; no ! he was certainly an exquisite *du suprême bon ton*. His dress, his air, his manner, were all equally eccentric. He advanced, by measured steps, towards the whist-table ; and, after offering his hand with infinite grace to Lady Norbury, he began very deliberately to scrutinize Louisa and Lady Agnes through his glass.

The Countess seemed to hail his approach with much delight. “ How very late you are, my lord !” said she : “ we began to give you up.”

“ And pray, what have you done with Sloper ?” said Lord Norbury.

“ Oh ! the Doctor ? confound him, he is the

cause of my being so deuced late : he fell asleep, and snored so comfortably I could not find in my heart to wake him ; but, hoping every grunt would be the last, I kept the carriage waiting a full hour, and then, when he did awake, he was cold and cross, thought his dinner had not digested right, and so would not come. I wonder what business he has to eat so much ; and now I find Lady Anne has been dancing half the evening ; monstrous provoking it is."

The beau turned his eyes again towards the sofa, and again examined the two young ladies.

" By Jove !" said he, " there are lots of pretty women here. Handsome girls now, those two on that sofa there : who may they be ?"

Lady Norbury looked mysterious, and whispered something in the gentleman's ear ; then introduced him, in due form, to Lord Beau-lieu : bows, long and low, followed ; and then the Countess, at the end of the deal, rose from

her seat, and taking the stranger's arm, walked up to the sofa with him, and presented Lord Dorville to Lady Agnes Beaulieu.

The young lady roused her almost dormant faculties, and recalled her smiles. The beau said something about courting popularity, and joining for once in a kitchen hop, but in so very low a tone that it was by no means easy to catch the meaning of what he said, particularly as he was all the time busily employed in stroking his very superb whiskers, and in caressing a little favourite tuft which graced the tip of a very well-turned chin: however, at length his lordship offered his arm to Lady Agnes, and the distinguished couple walked off to join the dancers in the other room.

Louisa remained on the sofa, but not long alone; she was soon joined by Sir Edward Barrington, who continued hobbling about.

“What an elegant girl that Miss Mildmay

is!" said Lord Beaulieu to Lady Margaret Carlton, when they had finished the rubber; "I am much struck with her, and feel particularly obliged for her kindness to my daughter."

"You admire her, do you?" said Lady Margaret, turning her malicious eyes towards the sofa: "very foreign in her look and air; *voila tout*, I should say." Then in a whisper to Lady Norbury, "How animated Sir Edward seems! how lucky that his tender Maria does not see him! But surely, my lord, when Lady Agnes was on the sofa, few people would look at that Miss Mildmay, and her foreign *tour-nure*; or as my brother, the Duke of Clanalpin, terms it, French humbug; he always says, 'Well! thank God, Moggy, your girls are quite English, and natural;' and I am sure I hope they are."

"Miss Birmingham is one of the finest girls in the room, I think," said Lord Norbury.

"She is really prodigiously improved, and I prophecy that she will produce a wonderful effect in the world."

"In a certain set, perhaps, she may," said Lady Norbury, with her most disdainful toss of the head; "but it will not be in what I should term *the world par excellence*."

"Oh, hang your distinctions, my Lady Norbury," said the Earl. "I take it we shall all see that an heiress of 20,000*l.* per annum may buy an introduction to the very first world."

"So you may please to imagine, my Lord, but pardon me if I differ from you; wealth is one thing, and very good as far as it goes, but it never can be considered as a *sine quâ non* in good company."

"What delightful good looks dear Lady Anne is in to-night!" said Lady Margaret. "The Archdeacon will so regret not being here to see her. She is his belle, you know."

"I am so sorry Lady Glenmore is not here,"

said Lady Norbury; "and Lord Glenmore writes to my lord that she is so very indifferent. She is such a delicate little creature, one trembles for her; and he, poor man! is so anxious, and so much alarmed."

"Oh, then there are really hopes of an heir," said Lady Margaret: "I thought it must be so, from all I heard. Well, if I see Lord Glenmore, I shall certainly advise his sending off for Lady Danvers. Those young things of sixteen are always so imprudent."

"Pray," said Mrs. Metcalf, who had been a long time half asleep, "are the Sydenhams come?"

"Oh dear no!" said Lady Margaret. "They never come to these sort of things; Mr. Sydenham is much too fine for country balls. They will not even dine out now, I assure you, and in our dining-out neighbourhood too: so absurd!"

"Hark!" said Lord Beaulieu: "there is a French country-dance beginning; shall we go

and see them? I am told that one of the Miss Mildmays dances in a very superior style."

Nor was he disappointed: nothing could be more graceful than Louisa's air in a quadrille; she had acquired the true Parisian style of dancing, and with Lord George for her partner, and Barbara and Colonel Montague for *vis-à-vis*, she really outdid herself. She was the admiration of the whole room, with one exception, and that one was Lady Margaret Carlton. "Upon the whole, her ladyship must say, she did not quite admire it; she believed it was bad taste, but so it was,—she could not like such very French steps."

Her own two stiff daughters did not appear to advantage, though they had learned of both M. and Madame Guillet: but Miss Carlton was dancing with Lord Mordaunt,—Lady Margaret saw that, and was satisfied. The Ladies Beaulieu displayed all the light agility of youth, and Sir Edward Barrington was quite delighted

with the sight of so many happy-looking young damsels, as he always termed young ladies. Quadrilles not having been long introduced at the Merton monthly assemblies, great was the anxiety and curiosity among the majority of the town's-people to see these dances, and it may be supposed how much admiration Louisa's *battemens* and *brisés* excited. Later in the evening, Lady Anne succeeded in persuading Lord Dorville to stand up with her in a waltz, and her own particular set kept her in countenance. Louisa, who, as her ladyship expressed it, was quite "one of us," surpassed all the others in that enchanting dance, whose charm can never be appreciated by any cold-blooded spectator. But vain were all their efforts to make Barbara join the magic circle; she could not be persuaded. Her friend Julia had gone with Mrs. Penelope into the card-room; so poor Miss Birmingham was reduced to sit in a corner, and obliged of course, quite

à contre cœur, to flirt with Colonel Montague, who, out of pure compassion, had taken a vacant seat next her.

At supper there was much eating, and some flirting; all the company seemed happily placed; grandees opposite grandees, and dashing dragoons divided by delighted young ladies. The ball did not break up till a late hour: the last dances were far the merriest, when all form and ceremony was at an end; so that the more elderly people joined in them with as much spirit as the young ones.

At length the weary fiddlers were comforted with the sight of numbers departing: there was a hope it would soon be over. Miss Birmingham's carriage was announced. Colonel Montague was observed to *shawl* her with the utmost care: she held his arm, while she took an affectionate leave of her friends the Mildmays. He led her through the room, and every eye was turned upon them.

"May I hope," said Lionel to her in a low voice as they went down stairs, "that you will not forget me, when we meet in town?"

"Oh! how could you ever fancy such a thing!" was her answer in a still lower tone. "I trust you will introduce me to your sister, and that we shall be very intimate. How often I shall think over my delightful visit to Bishop's-Court! Good night! good night!"

He handed her in, and waited at the door till the carriage had driven out of sight, and then returned to the ball-room. As he walked by, Lord George whispered to Louisa, "Poor Lionel! he is dead smit: never saw a man so fairly done; and your friend too, oh! *son petit cœur a parlé*; her eyes danced with pleasure while he was flirting with her."

"Well, Lord George," said Godfrey Mildmay, "I do think you are a bold man, to talk of any body's flirting after your own."

Lord George laughed off this attack with a

very good grace, casting every now and then a side glance at Louisa, who blushed most becomingly ; but Godfrey rallied his sister all the way home on her decided partiality for this dashing dragoon. At length, fairly driven to extremities, Louisa exclaimed, " Well, I always told you he was a great favourite of mine. He went on to-night just as he used always to do at Paris."

" Better and better," said Godfrey drily.

" He seems a very nice dandy sort of young gentleman," said old Mr. Mildmay.

" A dandy Lord, if you please, brother," said Mrs. Penelope with dignity.

Thus ended this famous election-ball, which is yet recollected at Merton with pride and satisfaction. Among the *beau monde* of that distinguished borough, nothing was so much talked of on the morrow as Colonel Montague's kind attention to every body, and his evident admiration of the heiress. She also

came in for no small share of praise; every one could relate some act of kindness, some proof of good-nature, shown by Miss Birmingham. Louisa's fine steps and Paris graces had not produced half the effect of one of Julia's smiles. Barbara's kind shake of the hand to several of her old play-fellows had endeared her to them for life: so easy is it to acquire regard, though such little acts of kindness are despised by those who aim only to shine, and who prefer admiration to esteem.

CHAPTER X.

A GALLERY OF PORTRAITS.

“Ten thousand fools unsung are still in view.”

YOUNG'S SATIRES.

THE Birminghams, according to their agreement, called for Julia, as they passed by Bishop's-Court on their way to town: it was something quite new to her to leave home, and she made Mr. Mildmay promise, that, if any of his rheumatic pains came on in the spring, he would send for her immediately. Soon after her departure, Louisa, attended by Mademoiselle Eloise, set off for Norbury; Colonel Montague rode with Godfrey Mildmay.

The distance from Bishop's-Court to Norbury was about five miles of very good road. The park was a handsome piece of ground:—by handsome, I mean, that Nature had done but little for it, but that it had received all the improvement and cultivation which layers out of ground can give: belts, clumps, screens, and curious park-paling; handsome single trees, fenced off, so as to demand attention, should the eye of the spectator fail to discover their merits unassisted. The pleasure-ground was distinguished by its elegant wire fence; and in summer nothing could be more beautiful than its curious flower-beds, and baskets covered with creepers: the utmost neatness prevailed everywhere.

The house was a plain handsome building; it contained some very spacious apartments, furnished with much magnificence, but little taste; it was all upholstery work, and there was so much of it, that the lively Lady Glen-

more once remarked, that she thought Lady Norbury must have been bit by a mad cabinet-maker. There were no pictures, vertu, statues, or any sort of classic taste, but every thing looked new, gaudy, and solid; I may also add, dull, for Norbury was proverbially dull, and a visit there could seldom be a pleasant thing. No endeavours were ever made on the part of either Lord or Lady Norbury to make it so; they seemed to think that the honour of visiting them must be sufficient gratification in itself; nothing more could be necessary.

Lady Anne generally amused herself in ridiculing all the country visitors; and Lord Mordaunt seldom took any notice of them. There was now a large party staying at Norbury, but all were what Lady Anne denominated humdrums, or natives. The grantees were not expected for a day or two.—Perhaps the reader may not dislike to have

a slight sketch of the various characters who composed the party.

As married ladies have always precedence, I will begin with Mrs. Metcalf, who had at this time been above five weeks at Norbury. She was a portly widow of sixty, and had been a great beauty, who had figured away at Bath, Scarborough, and all the other places of public amusement, which were resorted to forty years ago. She afterwards became a noted belle at Ranelagh and Vauxhall; in their days of celebrity had been talked of for many lords and men of account; but, somehow or other, she had sealed her fate, by accepting the addresses of a simple country gentleman; simple enough, in truth, he was, and ugly enough; but *les beaux yeux de sa cassette* smit the fair Lucretia Barrat, and she consented to become Mrs. Metcalf. For a few years she ruled with undisputed sway, until at last she fairly worried the

poor man out of the world; but he left his estate behind him, and she took good care to have it all settled upon herself. She was at that time considerably turned of forty, and she wisely determined not to sacrifice her liberty a second time: matrimony had procured her what she wanted, and she was satisfied; so she commenced independent dasher.

She rouged high, and played high, and talked loud, and laughed louder, gave good dinners, and told good stories. She wanted neither wit nor impudence; any body may be witty who dares to say any thing to every body. She loved to put prudish ladies out of countenance by a bold *bon mot*. Then she delighted in bringing young people together, to have a hand in a catch-match: to help on a marriage was a great pleasure, but to assist in marring one was a greater still, to Mrs. Metcalf.

Such had been the pursuits of this gay widow for twenty long years, and though now

a little the worse for wear, she yet lorded it over the great world with considerable success. Time, it was true, began rather to tame her wit, but it could not quiet her tongue ; she now became a noted teller of stories : not lies, gentle reader, only embellished truths. Mrs. Metcalf had a capital memory, knew every thing about every body, recollected all the scandal of the great world, since the American war, and retailed it for the tenth, twentieth, thirtieth time, with the utmost point and *esprit*. Then she was learned in pedigrees, genealogies, and anecdotes of families, and she was never tired of hearing herself talk. By such talents old Anno Domini, as she was often called, became a welcome visitor in many a house where the master and mistress distrusted their own powers of conversation. Neither barking dogs, nor chirping birds, could force her to silence ; and she has been known to begin a story to a large circle, who in the course of it had all dropped off

under some pretence or other, and, *faute de mieux*, she has finished it to the footman, who happened fortunately to come in with coals. Mrs. Metcalf's house, in Lower Grosvenor Street, was the resort of all the idle old men of a certain set, who delighted in talking over times long past, and refreshing their memories with obsolete scandal; all the news of the present day was also sure of being retailed there.

Lord Norbury was one of the constant attendants at Mrs. Metcalf's morning coteries; and in return she fastened herself upon them at Norbury, for as long a time as she found it convenient. The Countess sometimes tired of her badinage; but, on the whole, she saved her ladyship the trouble of exerting herself, besides talking her to sleep at least once in every day. Lady Anne delighted in the old lady, and the young men greatly enjoyed her *rich stories*. So much for this independent widow.

The next in order and in merit was an

independent old maid, Miss Belinda Bevil, who had become acquainted with Lady Anne Norbury at Mrs. Metcalf's parties in town; had invited herself to Norbury, and moreover had cleverly manœuvred to make Mrs. Metcalf frank her down in her roomy old-fashioned chariot. Miss Bevil was a person of no birth, but she had somehow or other, when a girl, rendered herself useful to a rich old lady, and with her she went abroad in the capacity of a humble companion. Their residence on the Continent turned out rather longer than they could have wished; for they were among the unfortunate *détenus* in France, after the peace of Amiens. Miss Bevil lost her protectress abroad; but she left the poor girl a legacy of 20,000*l.* in the funds, as a small return for the patience and flattery she had exerted for so many years.

During her residence in France, she had acquired a strong taste for French manners,

French cookery, French dress, and French gallantry; she danced, and she coquetted, but she retained her freedom and her fortune: these were only to be bartered for rank in England.

In process of time, Miss Bevil was allowed to return to her own country. She took a house in London, was very foreign, very literary, and very diplomatic; indeed, she aspired to be a *bel esprit, un peu philosophe*.

Many gentlemen better stored with wit than money, found it very convenient to be at her house; but in a few years Miss Bevil discovered that it would be necessary for her to reduce her style of living, her expenses having somewhat exceeded her means. She had had various *proneurs* and *causeurs* among those who had declared that the old maid gave good feeds: some might even have aspired a little further, but none had yet been bold enough to offer for her hand; and during so

long a wear and tear in England, and out of it, our fair spinster's reputation had become a little tarnished; it had received various injuries, yet it still contrived to keep together. Miss Bevil was now turned forty, and all hopes of success in matrimony having nearly vanished, she thought only of improving the present moment, and catching folly as it flies.

Foreigners, were, however, still her favourites, and she went great lengths with various Marquesses and Barons. She gave diplomatic *soirées*, where she collected a specimen of every nation in Europe, to stare at each other; she said odd things to make these odd people wonder, affected great freedom with men of notoriety, set up as a crack billiard-player, made chess appointments, in short, tried all ways to gain celebrity. She kept no carriage, and was, therefore, a perpetual torment to those who did.

There was no manœuvre she would not

practise, no art to which she would not stoop, in order to get carried from place to place; and these arrangements occasioned so many notes and messages *pour et contre*, that by the liveried clan in London this lady was usually denominated "The footman's devil." Another of her plans was, to cause herself to be invited to some pleasant country-house; and when there, if she found the quarters good, it was by no means easy to dislodge her. On the present occasion, she had fastened herself on Mrs. Metcalf, and had thus got taken to Norbury free of expense, and finding it a house of very general resort, she promised herself a frequent repetition of her visits there.

The Misses Molyneux, the daughters of Ralph Molyneux, Esq. the High Sheriff for the county, were very common-place sort of young ladies, such as are to be met with in every neighbourhood. They were now on a visit to Norbury during the absence of their father, who

had been ordered to Brighton for a rheumatic complaint in his limbs ; and the two girls were both of them favourite protégées of Lady Norbury's. Like many other great ladies, she was never thoroughly comfortable in the country without one or two Misses, who were to be always at her ladyship's call, a sort of *souffre-douleurs* usually denominated toad-eaters. The eldest of the sisters had long been a sort of half beauty, and still gave herself beauty airs, though she was now thoroughly *passée* : she was very foolish, sentimental, and affected, always fancying herself in love with some handsome young man or other, who was probably not in the least thinking of her. Miss Molyneux made herself acceptable at the different houses at which she visited, by various agreeable accomplishments : she could play quadrilles and waltzes for the dancers ; she could sing a second in a duet not very much out of time, and take a view not very much out of perspective. She

understood Japan work, crape work, and chenille work : she excelled in the manufactory of card racks, hand-screens, and chimney-piece ornaments ; and to crown all, she could talk a little French and Italian, if she happened to stumble on any foreigners. Thus accomplished, Dora (for so she had refined the elderly name of Dorothy) became a valuable acquisition, wherever a lady of all work was wanted in a great house, or at a large party.

Miss Maria Molyneux, the younger sister, was in the useful, not the ornamental way ; she wrote all Lady Norbury's notes for her, and deciphered the letters of all her ladyship's correspondents who wrote crabbed hands ; she arranged her canvass work, wound her various worsteds, drew her patterns, took up the stiches of her fleecy hosiery knitting, or cut off the defective rows of her netting ; she looked after the birds, caressed the dogs, trimmed and watered the plants ; tuned the harp for Lady Anne,

copied music for her, cut the leaves of the new novels, and mended all the pens for all the inkstands. So clever, so useful, so busy, it was quite impossible that the Misses Molyneux and their talents should not be welcome visitors, and particularly at Norbury, where a large party of the idle of both sexes were always collected. The small services of the Molyneux girls (so they were generally designated in the Merton neighbourhood) were sure to save the mistress of a mansion an infinitude of trouble; and for that reason the fair sisters were certain of being found wherever there might happen to be a crowd of people assembled together. Miss Molyneux made the tea at breakfast every where, and Miss Maria as constantly presided over the coffee. Lord Mordaunt used to say that you were about as sure of finding them as your knife and fork; and Lady Anne termed them the Appendix and Addenda to the general visiting calendar.

Miss Maria was just now making a dead set at Sir Edward Barrington, a rich old baronet, something the worse for gout and port wine. Though he was one of the members for the county, he was too fat and red-faced for Miss Molyneux's more refined taste : but Miss Maria thought she should be of great use to him as a nurse, of which every one decided he was in want. She had great hopes of success, founded on three reasons :—

First, he had taken to wearing flannel waist-coats on her particular recommendation.

Secondly, she had been requested by him to write out for his own use, her infallible cure for the heart-burn.

Thirdly, she had tied up his thumb with her own fair hands, after he had cut it in helping her to pine-apple.

After such demonstrations of esteem, was it not fair to conclude that love was on the way ?

“ Alas, poor Cupid ! thou’rt a treacherous imp.”

Lord Dorville stands next in our gallery of portraits, (which I declare to be all originals). This young Viscount was lately come of age, after a very irksome minority. He had a high pedigree and a large fortune, a head but indifferently filled with sense, either natural or acquired, and I think even Locke himself would have been puzzled to find out his innate ideas. He was chiefly distinguished for very white teeth and very white hands, both of which he cherished to a degree which made Lady Anne Norbury call him "fairly fair." This was when he had excited her ladyship's displeasure, for at other moments she laid the closest siege to his heart, which she often felt inclined to pronounce impregnable. If sometimes it thawed at night, invariably it froze again before morning. But though a violent assault had as yet done nothing, Lady Anne had the greatest hopes from the effect of a persevering blockade:—he might be tired out of cruelty, or teased into

love—there was no telling—at all events it was worth trying ; and so to work she went with all possible perseverance, and Lord Dorville stayed so long at Norbury that she certainly had no small hopes. Her ladyship discovered, that though flattery could not touch him, he could be piqued by indifference, his vanity was soon mortified ; and so she treated him with the easiest *nonchalance*, and played off every kind of stratagem in order to win that prize, his little lily hand. We will, for the present, leave Lord Dorville to file his teeth and pare his nails, according to Lord Chesterfield's most elaborate instructions, while we proceed to describe Dr. Samuel Sloper. This reverend divine was a constant inmate at Norbury. He had been tutor to Lord Mordaunt after he had left Eton, and during his residence at Cambridge, and since that time he had become domestic chaplain to the Earl of Norbury ; he had besides obtained two good rich livings, and was at this moment

looking anxiously forward to a stall in H—— Cathedral.

The doctor was a very portly, comfortable-looking person, much like many other gentlemen of his cloth. The first sermon he preached after being presented to his second living, was on this text :—" I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." He was noted for saying grace in a most dignified manner ; few men had a better appetite, or could carve a haunch of venison with more dexterity ; for he was a *bon vivant* of the most refined description—his love of eating being only balanced by his love of talking, and the stentorian power of his lungs. His knowledge in the good things of the table rendered him a particular friend and favourite of the Archdeacon's.

The Abbé le Blanc, whose portrait must come next, was a gay, complaisant Frenchman, who had travelled with Lord Mordaunt on the Continent ; the very best creature in the world ; had

flattery for all tastes, told a *lie* with superlative grace, and excelled in that pleasing talk, so often nicknamed “small,” in which manner makes up for matter: by the ladies he was generally pronounced to be a most agreeable creature; he was indeed of that species so well described by the Poet:—

“All sciences a fasting Monseur knows,
And bid him go to hell!—to hell he goes.”

In my gallery of the *distingués* at Norbury, I find I have been guilty of an error, in not giving precedence due to “the dear Carltons.” I am really shocked to death at such a transgression, for which I fear they will not easily forgive me; however, I will endeavour to make amends by describing them very fully.

The Lady Margaret Carlton, the wife of the very venerable the Archdeacon of H——, must be too well known as sister to the present, and daughter to the late, Duke of Clanalpin, for me to venture to say much about her;

yet it may be necessary to state that, early in life, she took fright at the warning presented to her by a host of maiden aunts and cousins, and therefore determined to marry as soon as she conveniently could. As no eligible offer presented itself, at least none that her family sanctioned, the Lady Margaret made up, without loss of time, to a young man who was domestic chaplain to the Duke her father, and in the space of a few months she succeeded in persuading the Rev. Mr. Carlton to elope with her. They were at first very poor; but he was of a good family in the north of England, and, through the intercession of some of his friends, the Duke of Clanalpin condescended to forgive such a misalliance, and to receive the Lady Margaret and her husband into favour.

In the course of twenty years, the smart dandy young clergyman was metamorphosed into a fat, pompous, gormandizing divine. Through the interest of some of his noble relations, he

obtained two very valuable livings, he was a D.D. and Prebendary to boot, and had lately become Archdeacon of H——, a promotion which afforded much satisfaction to Lady Margaret, as it gave him a decided designation. Mr. Archdeacon sounded well; now Dr. Carlton was always liable to be taken for a physician. They had a large family of beauties, and prodigies; and Lady Margaret turned out a most admirable manager, for she certainly kept a better table than either the Dean or the Bishop of H——, and yet was far from extravagant; and her children were brought up with infinite care, economy, and pride. The granddaughters of a duke could not be expected to vegetate in the country; so they paid an annual visit to the metropolis, to empty the worthy Archdeacon's purse, and to refresh the memories of all their right honourable cousins.

The two Miss Carltons were as well known as any other fashionable young ladies, in Hyde

Park, or Kensington Gardens, or any other public resort,

“ Where white-robed Misses amble two by two,
Nodding to booted beaux, How do ! How do ! ”

They paraded one day in Fool's Fair, and the next they galloped up Rotton Row, or down Constitution Hill ; and they danced at charity balls at Willis's Rooms, and then talked of what they did at Almack's—not but that they always did get one subscription before Easter ; they were generally at the Ancient Music, and very often at the French Play. Strange that such pains should not answer ! but, alas ! year after year passed on without one offer, one hope even of a proposal on the way ; the young ladies were quite in despair, while their mamma declared that men in these days were quite different beings to what they used to be formerly, when dear delightful Ranelagh was in fashion. She believed, it was owing to quadrilles that there were so few flirtations ; all those French fashions

that came in with the peace, did no good, as she had always said, and so the Duke of Clanalpin said, and his grace's words were always law with the Lady Margaret.

When her ladyship was tired of inveighing against those abominable creatures "men," she generally directed the whole artillery of her wit at her neighbours, the Sydenhams. They were a family who resided in the vicinity of the city of H——, at a very beautiful place called Elsinore Lodge, (which Mr. Sydenham had taken for a term of years.) His fine grounds joined the Archdeacon's small demesnes, and *ferme ornée*. These were people Lady Margaret could not endure, for they were really nobodies, complete *parvenus*, yet rich, fashionable, nay even *ton*, and in the highest set too.

Of Mr. Sydenham's birth little was known, but by the death of a distant relation he had succeeded, some years before, to a considerable

West Indian property. In his youth he had been in the Guards, and had lived much in the very first circles, particularly on the Continent, where he had passed several years, and had formed his manners upon the best models of the old French court; the striking beauty of his person, and the irresistible grace of his address, having attracted the notice even of the unfortunate Marie Antoinette herself. He had afterwards been attached to one or two foreign missions in the north of Europe. It was at the court of Stuttgart that, twenty years before, the beautiful Adelaide Butler had made a conquest of the high-bred diplomat. She was the daughter of an English clergyman, of good private fortune, who had contrived to ruin himself by a love of fine company, fine pictures, and other fine follies. He had been obliged to retire abroad, with his only daughter, whose beauty and accomplishments soon attracted the notice even of the court. The idle moments

of the insinuating Mr. Sydenham were entirely devoted to Miss Butler. His attentions were so pointed, that at last the world began to talk. The artful father saw, yet took no notice, till at length the fair fame of the young lady seemed in a likely way to be lost for ever; when the Reverend Mr. Butler, with something of Hibernian spirit, hinted to his friend Sydenham, that unless he made the only reparation then in his power to his unfortunate daughter, he should not consider his cloth as any obstacle in the way of chastising a scoundrel, but should insist on a meeting immediately. The diplomat would willingly have entered into negotiations, but Mr. Butler would hear of no delay. Death or marriage was his offer, and Mr. Sydenham chose the latter, as the least unpleasant of the two. That very evening, the chaplain to the embassy united the dashing, fashionable, dangerous Sydenham, to the young and beautiful Adelaide Butler. All the world,—I mean the

Stuttgard world,—rejoiced that this gay deceiver was at last caught. Many had been the victims of his arts; and there was no doubt that he meant to have added Miss Butler to the number, not supposing that a clergyman had any redress in his power. “*Mais*,” as a distinguished French writer observes, “*on peut être plus fin qu’un autre, mais pas plus fin que tous les autres* ;” and old Butler knew what he was about full as well as Mr. Sydenham, or better, as the sequel has shown, if we allow that the test of merit be success. It happened too, fortunately enough, that Mr. Butler had some interest with the then ministry at home; and, being a regular *intrigant*, he got his son-in-law removed to Dresden. This was both convenient and agreeable, as some of the Stuttgard people still looked a little shy upon the lovely bride; and our minister had had certain *liaisons* from which he was glad enough now to break. To Dresden, therefore, they went, and there

Mrs. Sydenham presented him with a daughter, and none of the Saxon ladies were at all the wiser, or thought it odd that so fine a babe should make its appearance rather before the proper time. In fact, they knew nothing at all about the matter;—and if they had,—why, these things happen every day—*c'est possible peut-être*. In England, we suppose, it would have been different. Well, *n'importe*, Mr. and Mrs. Sydenham turned out a very happy couple: they suited exactly, and very few people indeed knew any thing about the Stuttgart gossip. Besides, it was now twenty years ago. Mr. Sydenham returned to England a few years after his marriage, on succeeding to a large fortune, left him unexpectedly by a distant relation, and he soon after settled at Elsinore Lodge, in the county of H——; and he and his wife being thought very elegant, fashionable people, were soon visited by most of the county; and, before the Miss Carltons were brought out,

they had been the dearest and most intimate friends of Mr. Archdeacon and Lady Margaret Carlton. But the times change, and we change with the times, *malheureusement* ; for Mr. Sydenham was now a perfect *time past*, a *ci-devant* young man, made up a little, to be sure, but that no one could wonder at : for he had shone a beau so long as since the reign of red heels and solitaires, when bows and fine manners carried the day, before *distingués*, *exquisites*, *elegants*, or dandies, were thought of ; he had then been the accomplished macaroni.

A thousand little falsities were said to compose his toilette ; teeth, eyebrows, whiskers, calves to his legs, were all supposed to be artificial ; there was no end of the stories related of this singular man's dress, and which, it was said, he much liked to hear talked about, as giving a great idea of his eccentric appearance.

His manners were equally uncommon : he

affected the most ceremonious high breeding to every body, the most assiduous gallantry marked his conversation with ladies. He had passed all his life in the *plus grand monde*, had certainly seen much that was extraordinary, and had lived in intimacy with many celebrated personages. He possessed the *art de narrer* in perfection, but usually embellished his stories in so amusing a manner, that he was known every where by the name of Lying Sydenham.

Mrs. Sydenham was just what one might expect the wife of such a man to be—a compound of affectation and address, a mixture of folly and talent. She was at once both the fine lady and the fine woman, for she had still great remains of beauty, though her daughter Laura certainly outshone her, and was taller by the head.

Mrs. Sydenham could not boast of any noble relations; there Lady Margaret Carlton had all the advantage: but fashion, high-breeding, and belonging to a certain set, the exclusive *bon*

ton, reconciled her to her fate. Mr. Sydenham's house in Seymour Place was not large, but it was fitted up in the best taste; his small collection of cabinet pictures was most choice, his equipages, his cook, his wines, were all perfect of their kind. The finest men in London were certain to be found at Mrs. Sydenham's *petits soupers*; her things were always so select, the very cream of good company. She perfectly understood that sort of society; she could work her way up-hill with such inimitable art, such graceful effrontery, that even Mr. Sydenham, with all his knowledge of men and manners, was often struck with wonder at his wife's abilities. She had now an additional motive for exerting all her talents; for her daughter, the accomplished Laura, had just made her *début*, and from her cradle it had been decreed that she was to outdo all that ever yet had been seen in the female world. For the last three years, Mrs. Sydenham and her friends had *prôné*

Laura's grace and beauty from one circle to another; and now she appeared to receive the incense which an admiring world was to offer at her shrine. Had nothing been said about her, she would have been termed handsome; but, as it was, she only obtained the praise of being a well-grown girl. With respect to her accomplishments, she had been taught every thing, and had therefore attained nothing. She set up, however, for a highly educated young woman, of a refined and most cultivated mind; but, alas! the poverty of the soil prevented any of the fruits from reaching perfection, and Miss Sydenham's affectation of mental superiority was much more tiresome than common folly would have been: however, she shone among the *blues*, was seen everywhere every night, was always better dressed than any body, and certainly looked very well when she did not stand too near her mother.

This family, with their various advantages,

could not but provoke Lady Margaret Carlton. Such people to become *ton*! what right could they have to it? while she, a Clanalpin, descended from the Scottish monarchs of old, to have to make way for a Mrs. Sydenham! No! it was not to be borne. Had she known the Stuttgard story, she would certainly have gone mad, for Lady Margaret was chaste as the icicle on Dian's temple.

CHAPTER XI.

FASHIONABLE CONVERSATION.

“Next you have news by sea and land, all
Season’d, if possible, with scandal,
Broad hint, and inference censorious,
Making things doubtful quite notorious.”

ADVICE TO JULIA.

WE left Miss Louisa Mildmay, at the beginning of the last chapter, driving up the grand approach to Norbury house: she was met at the second gate by Lady Anne, who stopped the carriage.

“Ah! my dearest Louisa, by all that’s lucky I have just caught you in time: will you walk

with me round the pleasure-ground? we can have a nice stroll before dinner." Louisa desired nothing better, and was out of the carriage in an instant. Lady Anne continued. "Is not that my friend the adorable Eloise, with her ribands *couleur de rosé*? *Ah! bon jour, Mademoiselle, je suis charmée de vous voir en si bonne santé; vous trouverez votre amie Mademoiselle Chiffon, à la maison, elle sera ravie de vous voir.*"

Eloise dropped her most graceful curtsy, and re-entering the carriage, drove off. .

"I thought," said Lady Anne, "that that respectable-looking brown chaise must be Mr. Mildmay's: I might have remembered your long-tailed blacks and old grey-headed Peter. But you look cold, Louisa: cross your shawl."

"Oh! I shall be warm in a moment if we walk quick; you know I have been an hour in the carriage. But, my dear Lady Anne, had I

not better pay my respects to Lady Norbury before I walk?"

"Bless me, how ceremonious you are grown all of a sudden, but I believe you may be right; as Captain O'Brian says, 'keep on the windward side as long as you can;' and we all know my good mamma loves attention. And I have a note to write to Mrs. Sydenham; so you'll find me in the boudoir when you have done all the proprieties in the saloon. But stay! first I must tell you whom you will find of the privy council there. The two Miss Carltons are deafening the company with a grand duett, 'The men of Prometheus,' I believe: I thought my ears would have been stunned; so I escaped. My Lady Margaret is pouring into Mamma's secret ear sundry anecdotes of all the leading characters in her neighbourhood, particularly respecting Mrs. and Miss Sydenham; they are coming here to-morrow: but the odious Carltons will be gone, I hope. Mamma is listening with her eyes

shut, and is half asleep, but my useful friend Maria Molyneux does not let a word escape her. You know Sir Edward Barrington delights so in Mrs. Sydenham, *le sage entend à demi mot*; you see I let you behind the curtain. Well, then, for the side-scene, old "Anno Domini," Mrs. Metcalf, is talk, talk, talk, at another table, to that sentimental prude Dora Molyneux; you know her white mealy face,—or take her own reading, pale and interesting,—she would not for the world look healthy, 'tis so vulgar. Then old Miss Bevil is reading some decent story, out of the last number *de la chronique scandaleuse*, in order to charm the Abbé Le Blanc this evening. She has been studying the Baron Grimm with him; you know she says, *tout est sain aux sains*. How you laugh, Louisa! Now, in your turn, you must tell me what you have been about with your handsome Colonel, a knight *sans peur et sans reproche*, come amongst

us to turn all our heads. Ah! she blushes; guilty upon my honour. Well! my love! here is the glass door, go through the conservatory to the saloon; as you know all the *Dramatis Personæ*, pray make yourself agreeable, and then come to me: when I have exerted all my *eloquence du billet*, I shall be *à vous ordres*."

Louisa never could stand Lady Anne's wit; she was obliged to wait a moment, that she might compose her countenance, and make her *entrée* with the true Parisian grace. She was received by the Countess with her usual dignified stateliness, which always succeeded in keeping people at as great a distance as possible; indeed, it was what she seemed ever labouring to attain. Lady Margaret Carlton, who had always an eye to effect, rightly judged that good-humoured ease would never appear to greater advantage, than when opposed to Lady Norbury's chilling manner. Nothing, therefore,

could be so gracious as her reception of Miss Louisa Mildmay; or so kind as her inquiries after all at Bishop's-Court;—I might add, or more minute, for she even recollected that the old house-dog, Keeper, had a cough the last time she was there, poor fellow! Miss Maria Molyneux thought it right to extend her hand in her usual stiff way. She was secretly wondering at Louisa's perfect composure, for she herself always felt disconcerted when Lady Norbury looked grand; and she longed to ask, if Louisa's hat and pelisse were just come from Paris. The other ladies took no notice of the new arrival. The Miss Carltons had finished their overture, but they were louder than ever in a grand march; Lady Norbury smelt at her *flacon*, and put her hand to her temples as if the noise overpowered her, but she was too polite to say so, and Lady Margaret could never fancy *her* daughters' music could be any thing but "*delightful*."

Louisa answered all the questions put to her. Lady Margaret enquired if Miss Mildmay was gone up to town with the Birminghams? Did Mr. Mildmay think of London in the spring? Was Colonel Montague to stay long in the neighbourhood? Had she heard from the Waldesteins lately?

Louisa informed her ladyship that she had just received an invitation from the Baroness to spend the spring with her in town.

Lady Margaret was now quite astonished, and her looks showed it, though it was not expressed.

“Who, then, would stay with dear Mr. Mildmay? it would be so dull for him if both his daughters were away; she quite felt for her good old friend.”

Louisa observed that her Aunt Penelope would be always there.

“Oh! Mrs. Pen.; true, I had forgotten her;

and, as my brother the Duke of Clanalpin always says, 'Nothing so useful or so little appreciated as a maiden sister;' then he always adds, 'There, Maggy, there's consolation for your daughters.' I told his grace he might keep his comfort to himself; I had no fear of wanting it;—though, to be sure, in this neighbourhood, where there are so few young men, one hardly knows how girls are to marry. My dear Lady Norbury, you should exert yourself, and get some beaux down from London."

"I am not fond of young men," said Lady Norbury, yawning; "they make such a noise in the house with their boots, and they clap the doors so after them; and my poor head cannot endure billiards, and battledoor and shuttlecock, on a wet day;" and her ladyship shut her eyes again.

Miss Maria Molyneux and Lady Margaret looked significantly at each other: a knock at the

window from Lady Anne served as a summons to Louisa, who gladly withdrew.

She was hardly out of hearing before Lady Margaret exclaimed, " Well ! certainly, some people have luck. Now to think of those two Mildmay girls. You see, the eldest, who is decidedly plain, has wormed herself into the Birmingham house,—a fine thing for her to be in London with them ! To be sure, it is not what I should have liked for either of my girls, but then, with their connexions, it is so different. Ten to one, now, if Miss Mildmay does not contrive to console some cast-off beau of the heiress's. Then, you see, this hoity-toity Baroness swears eternal friendship to this pert Miss Louisa, whom some people call pretty, but not I for one: she probably means her to catch this popular idol, this handsome Colonel."

" And if she does," said Lady Norbury, rousing herself, " I see no harm. The Mild-

mays are of a most respectable old family, and I am sure the Montagues owe them enough."

"And does your ladyship feel so little pity for poor Miss Birmingham? Eyes will speak out, and, unfortunately, her's told her secret too plainly, poor girl! the other night."

"I know nothing about it," said the Countess, somewhat haughtily: "I hate gossip, and I hear so much about these Birminghams, that I am quite sick of their vulgar name."

"Poor Lady Birmingham!" said Lady Margaret, laughing affectedly: "how hurt she would be, could she hear your ladyship; I am afraid she would think it a bad omen for Almack's. If writing her name in gold would do, she might certainly accomplish it; but how will she ever make a lady patroness swallow such a trading sound?"

'Twould be death to ears polite.'

Poor Mrs. Sydenham too! To the natives in the country it is easy to talk about what Laura

did at Almack's ; whom she danced with, and how this man flirted with her, and that man admired her dress ; but upon my honour, Miss Molyneux, I constantly observed how seldom Laura Sydenham ever danced at Almack's ; no girl of my acquaintance seemed less noticed : as my brother the Duke of Clanalpin used to say to me every Wednesday, ' A perfect wall-flower, Maggy, that tall girl with that mouthful of teeth.' "

" And beautiful teeth Miss Sydenham has," said Lady Norbury.

" Oh yes ! certainly, beautiful teeth ; only she does grin so to show them off, that one really gets sick even of such very fine teeth. And as I was saying, decidedly Laura Sydenham does not take with the men ; so learned, and bookish, and over-accomplished. I declare I trembled lest Adolphus Frederick should think of such a wise wife ; for at one time Mrs. Sydenham was always sending him opera tickets, and getting

him invitations to balls. But I own I should have been sorry to have a daughter-in-law so much too deep for all of us ; her geology, and mineralogy, and craniology, and conchology, would not have done us any good. Oh ! her eternal *ologies* would have worn me out. Then all those Italian men one meets at their house in Seymour Place,—such a set of Signors, whose names all end in *uni*: oh, defend me from them !”

“ Was not Miss Sydenham once talked of for Lord Glenmore ?” enquired Miss Bevil.

“ No, indeed,” returned Lady Margaret, “ her mother was the only person who ever talked of it, or I believe thought of it ; but she tried hard to catch him, one must do her the justice to say. But now that he is married, she has found out that Glenmore Place is the dullest house in the country. She does so pity that poor young thing, amongst all those old pictures, and still older tapestry.”

“ And is Lady Glenmore to be pitied then ? ”

“ Dear, no ! envied much rather. I do wonder, however, at this long visit of Lord Hazlemere : he did not use to be so fond of visiting his uncle, and now one would think the hopes of an heir would produce a still greater coolness ; yet I am told he is all attention to his new aunt.”

“ Perhaps he is in love with her, as she is so beautiful ? ”

“ Nonsense ! the fastidious Hazlemere in love with her, or any body else ! it would be an utter impossibility.”

“ *Le vrai n'est pas toujours vraisemblable,*” said Miss Bevil. “ But is nobody talked of for Miss Birmingham ? ”

“ Oh, she is not come out yet, you know ; but wait just a few months, and then see. I dare say all London will be at her feet,” said Mrs. Metcalf.

“ For London, read the nabobs and planters

in and about Portland Place," said Lady Norbury, in her coldest tone.

"I foresee," said Miss Molyneux, looking wise, "that the Birminghams and Sydenhams will be rivals in the fashionable world."

"Oh, to be sure," rejoined Lady Margaret, "the dash of *ton* and beauty, against the dash of wealth and vulgarity."

"But surely, dear Lady Margaret, Miss Birmingham is a fine girl, and not at all vulgar. Do not you think she will take?"

"Oh no! trust me, she will produce no effect in the great world, *et je m'y connois*. She is not bad-looking, that I allow; but there is no fashion about her, no style; nothing that will strike. So insipidly unpretending, such a sensitive plant; not fit to rough it through this busy world of ours, where all are pushing for the best places. She does not even seem to feel her own good fortune, but looks as if she

thought herself unworthy of her situation. To be sure, her mother has brass enough, but then it is such impudent, bare-faced vulgarity, and no knowledge of the world; her purse-proud airs will never get her into a certain set; she will not know in the least how to produce this girl; even all her money will not be able to bring her forward, you will see. Now there's the difference: Mrs. Sydenham, to do her justice, does know the world; but then there is such finessing, such manœuvring, and she does think so much of herself and the all-accomplished Laura, that one would rejoice that pride should get a fall. I really wish with all my heart, though I own I do not altogether expect it, that Miss Birmingham may marry well, it would vex Mrs. Sydenham so. Let us see, 20,000*l.* a-year, even without management, may buy a coronet."

This last innuendo was quite too much for

Lady Norbury's aristocratic feelings ; she secretly wondered that a Duke's daughter should so outrage nobility. " I am really too tired," said her ladyship, feeling for her aromatic vinegar ; " I must have a little quiet before dinner-time."

" I wonder what ails Lady Norbury?" said Lady Margaret to Miss Maria Molyneux, after the Countess had left the room ; " she seems always so sleepy : a fulness of blood in the head, I should fear."

Miss Maria was silent.

" Ails her ! exclaimed Mrs. Metcalf, " why, you have talked her to death, Lady Margaret. What with your daughters' charming duetts, and your entertaining stories, her nerves are evidently quite ajar."

" Well, 'faith ! now this is good," said Miss Bevil. " Mrs. Metcalf accusing any one of long talking ! why, my good friend, within

the last hour, I'll declare you have gone through the whole American war and French revolution to Miss Molyneux."

"We have, indeed, had a most intellectual discussion of times long since past," returned the young lady; "it has been quite the feast of reason with me."

"And, I am sure," retorted Miss Bevil, "the flow of wit on one side was most rapid."

"My dear Lady Margaret," said Lady Anne Norbury, entering the room, "does your ladyship know that the dressing-bell has rung some minutes ago?"

"Bless me! no; I had not an idea of it: how time does fly in pleasant society! But I will hurry my Abigail to the utmost. Come, girls, we must be quick."

"Oh, *you* need not hurry yourselves, my good friends," said Lady Anne, as soon as the Carltons were gone, to the other ladies; "but those Misses take more time to arrange than

any other people I know, and I had no wish to be sent after them again to-day, as I was yesterday, to say dinner was upon the table :—but they must be so terribly smart, so overcomingly elegant, wherever they go, that one can but wonder that the operation of the toilette is ever completed.”

When the society re-assembled before dinner, Colonel Montague and Mr. Godfrey Mildmay were introduced to the ladies. With most of them they were, however, previously acquainted; but it was a rule at Norbury to present every one as they entered the saloon, so that all might feel known to each other. Indeed, the Earl, being a man who devoted much attention to little matters, was extremely particular in the observance of certain regulations, which, he conceived, added comfort or *agrément* to society, or, in other words, to himself. One of his rules was, that at dinner the Lady Anne should always be placed on his right hand, and

the cooler with the champagne close to her : there were several reasons for this. Her ladyship was distinguished for the beauty of her hand and arm, and therefore, as she always offered to help, whenever her father asked any one to drink champagne with him, it was impossible but that the attention of the men near her must be caught, either by the arm or the bracelets; then it also prevented his lordship from being annoyed by the immediate vicinity of any of the hum-drum misses, whom he was sometimes obliged to invite, so that he could always have his joke *à part* with his daughter; and last, though not perhaps least among his reasons, it enabled him to keep a sort of eye upon this volatile young lady. She, for her part, did not in the least object to this arrangement; because it prevented her from being placed by any *seccatore*, whose rank or age entitled him to a seat near the Countess; and she could always signify to any lively

younger brother, her wishes to have him next her.

Lady Anne understood *à fond* all the *petit jeu* of society: she loved to form a plan, and then bring her pieces into action, with full knowledge of the game. She could always be agreeable when she chose, and her present intention was to captivate Lionel Montague. He would be a very creditable-looking flirt in the country; and if she once had him at her feet, it might, perhaps, give Lord Dorville a pang of jealousy, and quicken his motions a little; at least there would be no harm to let his lordship see that she could admire handsome commoners.

Lord Norbury had taken a fancy to patronize the new member. Who could tell but that he might at last become master of Atherford Abbey, and a man of leading weight in the county? It would, therefore, be good policy to patronize him now, on his first appearance.

He also wished to be the first to present our hero to the Duke of Derwent and Lord Glenmore. Besides, he should like to bring him out, to ascertain what side he would be likely to take in politics, if possible to shake his ideas of independence, and make a party man of him. Full of these projects, his lordship followed his daughter down stairs; and calling after her, "Anne!" said he, "my love! take my arm, let me be your cavalier for the moment. How well your hair is arranged! upon my word, you look armed for conquest."

The conscious beauty smiled assent.

"Mind," continued Lord Norbury, in his most decided manner, "that Colonel Montague sits next you at dinner to-day, I have particular reasons for wishing this."

"And so have I, papa; how fortunate that we should agree!" And she gave another arch look.

“ You are a silly girl,” said the admiring father, as he tapped her on the back.

In consequence of this intimation, Lady Anne immediately commenced her plan of operations on entering the saloon. She found Colonel Montague sitting a little way from the rest of the company, at a table covered with novels; he had taken up a volume of the last new tale of fiction; Lady Anne placed herself in a recess by the chimney corner, close to this table, so that she had him all to herself: he had his back turned to the company, and she sat opposite to him.

Lionel put down his book: Lady Anne begged he would not mind her, but began immediately talking so agreeably that it was quite impossible he could mind any thing else. They criticised together most of the books on the table, and were surprised to find how exactly they agreed in opinion. Colonel Montague was delighted with one of the characters in the

book he had taken up, and felt certain that it must be taken from the life. Lady Anne feared so too; it was a very ridiculous representation of an old maid, but she believed many as absurd might be found every day: and her eye glanced at Miss Bevil, whose portly person and well-rouged countenance did great honour to a *bergère* hat and pink *coupe de bal* dress.

Lionel was quite overset, and he and Lady Anne both appeared to be all at once much delighted with a ridiculous caricature, which lay on the table, and served as an excuse for their laughter. At that moment Lord Dorville made his *entrée*; his eye turned immediately to the recess, and he was a good deal surprised to see the sudden intimacy which had commenced there. Lady Anne and the young Colonel seemed to want no one. Somewhat piqued, he advanced at once towards the upper end of the room, where Lady Norbury sat in state, quite in the middle of the largest sofa; yet he

could not help listening, involuntarily, to every fresh burst of laughter from Lady Anne. So gay without him! was it possible? What a sudden change! To what fair one, then, should he devote himself for the moment? who was there disengaged? Miss Louisa Mildmay was a monstrous fine girl, with a foreign air and all that sort of thing; but then, hang it! she was on one of the *chaises longues* near the window, with Lord George beside her; he seemed to be whispering "soft nonsense" in her ear, and she was listening and blushing in a heavenly sort of way. How provoking! The rest of the women were all flats! To be sure, there were the two Miss Carltons, as gay as artificial roses could make them, with their crane-like necks, stiff stays, and rosy cheeks: the eldest was the best-looking; but just as his lordship had made up his mind to say something to her, he remembered that Lady Anne had once said, she never saw her parrot beak and vermilion lips, without

thinking of a bird with a cherry in its mouth ; and that her perpendicular figure always reminded her of a barber's block with a head at the top of it. This unpleasant recollection caused Lord Dorville to pass her unnoticed, and to address some of his gentle nothings to the plainer Miss Charlotte Augusta.

Lady Margaret was apparently in deep consultation with Lady Norbury, about some new geraniums which stood on a flower-stand near her, but really deeply interested in Lord Dorville's motions. She gave one maternal glance, and was satisfied. '*Ce que peut faire un nez retroussé,*' thought Lady Margaret to herself, as she recalled Marmontel's witty tale to her mind. Well, I should not have guessed it ; but so Charlotte is to have the luck : he certainly looked at them both, and most people think Apollonia so much the handsomest. Happy it is that tastes differ !"

Before dinner was announced, though when all were anxiously expecting it, Lord Mordaunt, *très mal à-propos*, asked Lady Anne if she could find him the plates to Humboldt's Travels; he wanted to show them to Mr. Godfrey Mildmay: Lady Anne had had them before luncheon; where had she put them?

How provoking! her ladyship was obliged to move; and, immediately after, Lionel left his hiding-place,—he had something to say to Lord George Fitzallan: and after Lady Anne had found the book, she had, of course, no inducement to tempt her to return to the recess, so she joined the circle. Lord Dorville instantly left Miss Charlotte Augusta, and placed himself behind Lady Anne's chair. She turned her head, he whispered to her something most flattering about her dress; she smiled, and listened as though she heard him not. Lord Norbury cast his scrutinizing eye upon his daughter, and

wondered how she would extricate herself from this unexpected dilemma. Perfectly unembarrassed, Lady Anne called out, "Colonel Montague, will you bring me my shawl? it is on the marble table close to you."

He obeyed, and was retreating.

"Oh, stop, stop!" said the lady, playfully, "you must assist to shawl me or you will only have half done your duty."

Lionel tried, but did not succeed to please her ladyship: he must begin again—yes! again, and again. Every eye was turned upon the shawl.

The men laughed aloud, all but Lord Dorville; he bit his lips: the women could not make it out. Lord Norbury enjoyed his daughter's stratagem extremely. Dinner was announced ere the folds of the cachemire were decided. Lord Norbury offered his arm to Lady Margaret Carlton: as he passed Lady Anne, he

smiled his approbation. Lady Norbury desired Lord Mordaunt would take care of Miss Carlton. "What are you about, Lord Dorville?" said Lady Anne; "Miss Charlotte Augusta is really waiting for you." He could not help himself, but the arm was taken, not offered. "Poor Dorville!" whispered Lord George to Louisa, as they followed next. "Say rather," said she, "Poor Lionel! to be so tormented about a shawl—*c'est trop!*"

"Oh, spare your pity, fair lady! he will know how to extricate himself. He will not sing 'Tell me how to woo thee, love!' to Lady Anne." Louisa blushed, though she hardly knew why.

Dr. Sloper and Mrs. Metcalf, the Abbé Le Blanc and Miss Bevil, Godfrey Mildmay between the two Misses Molyneux's the hobbling Archdeacon with Lady Norbury: such was the order of precedence.

Lady Anne gave one fresh turn—a final grace—to the beautiful shawl; and then with an exulting smile, took Colonel Montague's arm, and followed in the procession. She had gained her point; and the triumph of success sat proudly on her brow, as she took her seat next the Earl, with Lionel on her other side.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DINNER.

“The tender morsels on the palate melt,
And all the force of Cookery is felt.”

“Look,” said her ladyship to Louisa, who sat opposite to her, “I have made Colonel Montague understand, at last, how to fold it so as to show the ‘true inimitable Turkish border.’”

“*Un schall à palmes*, I protest,” replied Louisa; “quite invaluable, my dear Lady Anne.”

“How fortunate,” said Lord George, laughing, “that it is not *un schall peau de lapin*. Do you remember that ridiculous story in the “*Her-*

mite de la Chaussée d'Antin," of the lady who lost her lover by wearing a rabbit-skin instead of a camel's hair?"

The conversation, of course, now turned on *schalls*, and as long as the fish and soup lasted, nay, even after the "*coup d'après*," as the "*Almanach des Gourmands*" calls it,—cachemires continued to be the subject of discussion, and one that was taken in all its bearings. Thibet, Russian, Turkish, Persian, Spanish, Cachemires de Paris, London imitations, Edinburgh ditto, nay, even the Norwich manufacture was honoured with a place in this distinguished list:—when the Archdeacon, presumptuous man! ventured to change the subject of conversation, by bursting forth in praise of the lobster parties—they were delicious: "Is Monglas still your *chef de cuisine*?" said he, addressing himself to Lady Norbury.

"Oh dear, yes! I hope he will never leave us?"

"Is Monglas a descendant of Henri Quatre's famous cook?" enquired the erudite Miss Bevil.

No one could tell, but Dr. Sloper pronounced a Monglas to be an invaluable *réchauffé* of a chicken.

Miss Bevil immediately quoted Boileau's famous line:—

“ Un diner réchauffé ne valut jamais rien.”

The Abbé Le Blanc wished that Boileau could have heard this happy *à-propos*, “ *Il ne aurait été charmé.*”

Lord George thought that a cook's pedigree should be made out like that of a race-horse, and that the invention of a good dish should entitle him to an escutcheon.

Louisa hoped, however, that in the cook's pedigree, no escutcheon of pretence would be admitted.

This sally *fit fortune*, and was long and loudly applauded. Lord Norbury's delicious little Welsh mutton was next much admired at the bottom, while a turkey, stuffed with truffles, greatly excited the Archdeacon's appetite at the

top. The reverend gentleman was most busily employed in digesting, dissecting, and discussing. A dish of most exquisite coxcombs charmed Lady Margaret Carlton; she remembered with pleasure, what a favourite ragout this was of her brother's the Duke of Clan-alpin.

An eel reposing in pale pomona-green sorrel sauce, was much to Mrs. Metcalf's taste; she recommended it to every body. The Abbé observed that it was the same shade as *la robe de Madame, une belle verdure*; which made Lord Mordaunt remark, "that Mrs. Metcalf would always be an evergreen."

Côtelettes à la Maintenon, or, as she pronounced it, *à la Maintenant*, were patronized by Miss Molyneux,—“They must be quite a classic dish, from the Augustan age of Louis XIV.”—who happened to have read that morning, for the first time in her life, the history of

the famous *Veuve de Scarron*, in Madame de Genlis' novel which bears her name.

A vol au vent of poulet was quickly disappearing under the protection of the Abbe; he had long balanced between that and a *salmi de bécasses*. Dr. Sloper took up with a *sauté de veau*, which he declared was merely a new name to an old English dish, commonly called Scotch collops. The worthy doctor had a long debate with the Archdeacon, upon the derivation of a dish near him, *pigeons à la crapaudine*; nor could they settle the point at all, though Miss Bevil lent her weighty aid. Much information was also displayed upon the different sorts of wines which were produced. *Côte Rôtie*, *vin de Grave*, *Tinti di ponti*, Barsac, old Hock, and imperial Tokay, red and white Burgundy, English Claret compared with French Bordeaux, genuine Xeres, East and West India Madeira, Champagne, *mousseur* or still, *vieux*

vin de St. George,—a few of these were produced, which led to discussions upon the rest. Thus busily and happily were the company occupied, eating and drinking, talking and laughing.

Between the courses, Mr. Godfrey Mildmay remarked how many literary characters had been distinguished for their love of good eating; and he mentioned among others, the celebrated Dr. Paley, and the noted Cyril Jackson, formerly Dean of Christ Church.

The Archdeacon named some Bishop with whom he was intimate, who was really a monstrous *bon vivant*.

The Abbe Le Blanc whispered to Miss Bevil, “*Le vrai Amphitryon est celui où l'on dine.*”

“Talking of bishops,” said Lord Norbury, “pray Mr. Archdeacon, how came it that we had not the pleasure of your company when last the Bishop of H—— confirmed at Merton? I assure you we were all surprised that you did

not appear among the rest of the clergy of the diocese."

"His lordship never summoned me," answered the Archdeacon, very sulkily; "I was as much surprised as you could be, my lord."

"Lord Norbury has got on the wrong scent now," said Dr. Sloper to Lady Anne, in a whisper behind Colonel Montague. "It is suspected among the cloth, that the Bishop purposely omitted summoning Mr. Archdeacon Carlton: you know his lordship is very high church, so strict and decorous, and our friend the doctor is something of a latitudinarian, at least in practice. It is a very sore subject, I assure you."

"Is it, indeed?" said Lady Anne, "then I'll plague him with it a little longer." Then raising her voice, she said, "Charming man our new bishop is, Mr. Archdeacon; he won all the ladies' hearts when he was here;—so young

and good-looking, and with so little of a wig, too."

"He is too happy in your ladyship's approbation," said the Archdeacon sarcastically: "and Mrs. and the Miss Skinners, I hope you like them equally?"

"Oh, I have not seen them, but I hear they are very agreeable people, so musical and hospitable, that they are quite the life of H——, when they are at the palace, with their concerts and parties."

At the name of Skinner, Lady Margaret Carlton evidently felt disgusted, and the Miss Carltons exchanged looks.

"Was not Dr. Skinner head master of Weldon Regis School?" enquired Lionel.

"Yes, to be sure he was," said Dr. Sloper, "for many years; Dr. Warburton, whom you must remember, Colonel Montague, succeeded him."

"Dr. Skinner was an excellent master," said

Lord George ; “ I was a long time under him, and I am delighted to hear he has risen so high. Mrs. Skinner, too, is a good little soul ; she was very kind to all us boys, and used to take such good care of us, and wash our faces so clean,—only I remember she would scrub upwards, and turn our noses the wrong way.”

Lord Dorville laughed most heartily at this idea.

“ She is a rosy little woman, is not she ?” said Lord George, addressing Lady Margaret.

“ For rosy, read scarlet,” returned her Ladyship ; “ with a mouth stretching from ear to ear, and such manners, so antediluvian ; and her daughters—”

“ Are such prodigious quizzes !” said Miss Carlton ; “ I believe they talk Latin and Greek !”

“ And tune their own piano-fortes !” rejoined Miss Charlotte Augusta.

“ Lord Tresilian married the eldest daughter, did not he ?” said Lord George.

"Yes!" said Godfrey Mildmay, "and a most beautiful woman she is, and very highly accomplished."

"Good heavens! do you admire her?" said Miss Carlton; "the whole family do give themselves such airs since her marriage!"

"Well!" said Lady Anne maliciously, "I am so sorry they do not suit you; for I assure you, upon my honour, I hear so much of their perfections from various quarters—such capital people they seem to be, from accounts my friends have given of them."

"Dr. Skinner is a rising bishop, depend upon it, Mr. Archdeacon," said Lord Norbury, pompously; "I have reason to know that the present *premier* thinks—"

What these thoughts, were, however, was lost in air, Lord Norbury's attention being suddenly so much ingrossed in dissecting a very fine leveret, that he never finished his speech; and the Archdeacon, placable man!

sank his dislike to the Bishop of H—— at the sight of a brace of wild ducks. The table now again groaned under a load of good things, disguised in the most becoming manner. In the centre rose the Temple of Pæstum, formed of macaroons; the Greater Pyramids of Egypt graced either side, in spun sugar; while Chartreuses, Macedoines, and other compositions of equal merit, filled up the other spaces.

Lord Norbury now resumed. “The Bishop of H—— was, I think, at one time private tutor to Lord Tresilian.”

“He was, my Lord,” replied the doctor. “The Duke of Derwent’s patronage—that was, of course, his road to promotion: nothing like a patron in these degenerate days,” endeavouring to catch Lord Norbury’s eye.

The corners of the Earl’s mouth relaxed into a smile, a smile of contempt,—he took no further notice of the speech. “The Bishop would have drudged long enough at Weldon

school," continued Dr. Sloper, "unnoticed and unknown, had not his patron luckily been a staunch supporter of the then ministry."

"But you forget," said Godfrey Mildmay, indignantly, "how much he was distinguished, both for his abilities and conduct as head master, of —— College, Cambridge. He is one of the first theologians of the present day. His talents as a writer would have brought him into notice without any patron; but the penetration to discover such a man, reflects credit on the Duke of Derwent's discernment. The Bishop of H—— does him honour."

"Bravo! Mr. Mildmay," whispered Lady Anne to Lionel; "Do observe how crest-fallen the Carltons look; it is quite a treat to watch their countenances; the Archdeacon's digestion will suffer, I fear."

"Does your Ladyship, then," said he, "take such pleasure in mortifying your friends?"

"Friends! for Heaven's sake don't call them

friends!—people one is obliged to receive *par forme*, and whom I should rejoice never to see again.”

“ But then, *par forme*, should not you treat them with courtesy ?”

“ Oh ! I hate these common courtesies, they spoil all the acuter pleasures of life. Love me or hate me, but pray don't be indifferently civil. I wish always to live with those from whom I may learn something, or whom I could teach : I must either worship, or be worshipped by my friends ; but in a mere acquaintance I dearly love a butt.”

Her Ladyship fixed her sparkling eyes on Lionel : she was all fire and animation ; but her beauty had ceased to charm him, he was contrasting in his mind the difference between her and the gentle Barbara. As if his thoughts had been guessed at, he was roused from his reverie by hearing Lord George whisper something about the Birminghams to his neighbour

Louisa. He was asking if they were all gone to town: then, affecting to sigh, "I wonder," said he, "if your fair friend has ever cast one thought upon me since the ball."

"What vanity!" replied Louisa, "to suppose such a thing possible; but I imagine you mean to be in attendance upon her after Easter."

"Faith! I shall think about it; no bad spec, I am told. My lady, the mamma, will have a famous house; and getting oneself invited to her balls, will be no bad thing: half my acquaintance will, I have no doubt, be there. And then she has always opera tickets at a younger brother's service: oh, she's a famous patroness to have! And really, your friend the daughter is a monstrous fine girl; many good points about her; wants a little fashion and dash, and a new dress-maker, and then she'll be perfect. The plaits of her gown behind are always too much spread, they never sit so well as yours do by half;" and

he added, in a lower tone, "Some French corsets would improve her figure; don't you think so?"

This unexpected confidence set Louisa off laughing. Lionel was uneasy, trying to catch what they were saying, but in vain; just as he had caught the name of Birmingham, he was disturbed by a footman with a plate.

"Some of the cream in the inside of the Temple for my lady, if you please, Sir?"

Then he heard Lord George say, "Why, she has devilish good eyes, if she knew how to use them—*le doux langage des yeux*, which a fair friend of mine understands so well." Then another whisper, and another laugh, a saucy look, and a pleased blush, followed.

"Colonel Montague," said Lord Dorville, "will you send me some of the spun sugar from the base of the Pyramid?"

"Is not your lordship afraid of disturbing the mummies?" enquired Miss Bevil.

Lord Dorville seemed hardly to comprehend what she meant; perhaps he had never heard of mummies: and, as Louisa would have said, "*n'importe.*"

Lady Anne had been silent for some minutes; she had been observing Lionel; she had detected him watching Lord George and Louisa, trying to catch their conversation.

"Jealous, by all that's good!" thought she; "then I was right, and this girl has touched his heart; an old Paris flirtation, I dare say. Now will I encourage my saucy cousin; and Louisa is just a sort of girl to be delighted with the idea of having a marquis's younger son at her feet, particularly when her prudent sister is not in the way, to keep her in order. George means nothing, a mere *passo tempo* flirtation; and then, *mon cher* colonel, it will be hard if I cannot touch you a little."

So thought the enterprising Lady Anne; and in this spirit she addressed her neighbour, with

"I see, Colonel Montague, that the name of Birmingham has struck your ear as well as mine. Some of my Irish cousin's nonsense."

Lionel absolutely started with surprise.

"Yes," continued her ladyship, "it is not difficult to suppose what your feelings must be;" and she softened her voice. Lionel, more and more astonished, fixed his eyes full upon her.

"Pray don't look such unutterable things, lest all the world should guess your thoughts, as I have done. For, really, it does not require the penetration of a conjuror to imagine what you must suffer, at seeing such a noble place as Atherford Abbey inhabited by such people."

Colonel Montague breathed more freely than he had done for some minutes. "Good heavens! how it must hurt you! I really have some sentiment in my composition, though you, perhaps, like the rest of the world, have pronounced me incorrigibly flighty; but I am not quite so thoughtless as I appear."

Lionel again looked surprised.

The second course was now removing, and the cheese bustle began. Who would have Parmesan? and who would venture on Gruyere, Wiltshire, or Cheddar? Norman-cress, water-cress, salad, German salad, pronounced to be most excellent. Ale, Norbury home-brewed, justly celebrated; but, of course, few were found so old-fashioned as not to prefer Port wine after cheese. At length all was over. The gay dessert was placed upon the table-cloth; for Lady Norbury's nerves could not bear the clatter of the knives and forks upon the bare mahogany—it was so vulgar, so thoroughly John Bullish. The ice had been carried round, and the last, lingering footman had left the room. Nothing remained to be done of all the grand ceremonial, but “Which wine do you take? the claret is coming.” At length the claret came; at length all the com-

pany were helped, and every one was again at liberty to address his neighbour, and resume the interrupted *tête-à-tête*.

Lady Anne had not forgotten the object of her conversation, though there had been so long a pause: she was anxious to resume it; so, turning to her neighbour, she said, "Of course, when you were at Bishop's-Court, you were introduced to Lady Clarke Birmingham."

"I saw her several times when I was there," said Lionel.

"Oh, then, of course you would hear how she meant to go to pay a visit at Norbury, to tell my lord how her head director of the gardens had told her second inspector of the flowers to explain to the principal under-kitchen-gardener something of no manner of consequence, which was to go through ten or a dozen deputies; and all this trouble taken merely to inform you that she keeps nearly twenty gardeners, of all

degrees and qualities, at Atherford Abbey. Her vanity is so ingenious that it is sometimes quite entertaining."

Colonel Montague could not but allow that Lady Birmingham was ridiculous in the extreme.

"We are infinitely obliged to her," continued the young lady, "for supplying us all with constant amusement. She is the general subject of conversation for all the neighbourhood; fair game for laughter; a lawful prize, such as one meets in some shape or other in every county. We should all go to sleep without the dear Birminghams to talk over."

"But the daughter," said Colonel Montague in a low voice; "surely nothing can be said against her?"

"Oh, no! poor dear! no harm in her at all; she is really a fine-looking girl; has been educated at a country parson's, and so is very good and domestic, and all that sort of thing, *now*;

but wait till next year, and then we shall see what this famous heiress will turn out. With a certain set she will be every thing, and every needy fortune-hunter will be at her feet; she will probably be one of the greatest heiresses, if not the greatest in the kingdom; and who do you think will care whether her money came by a shoeblack or a Jew? Depend upon it, we shall all live to see this very demure, gentle-looking Barbara Birmingham at the head of *ton*. She looks now like milk and water in the act of freezing; insipid innocence: but gold to a young lady is in these days the true, the only touchstone of merit, much more than love. Who ever hears of love now?"

Colonel Montague felt inexpressible pain as her ladyship rattled on, anxious to captivate him with her wit, and quite unconscious of the feelings which made him continue to peel walnuts with such wonderful assiduity.

"Sir Benjamin Birmingham," said Lady

Anne, "is quite of another species from his lady."

"What is that you are saying of the Bir-minghams, Anne?" enquired Lord Norbury; then turning to Lionel, and taking a good deal of snuff, he added, "Miss Birmingham is grown a monstrous fine girl; she is wonderfully filled out since last year. A little London fashion, I predict, will do every thing for her, and I should not wonder if she were to make her way to the very first circles, and be an ornament to them——of the very first water," said his lordship, fixing his eyes upon a superb diamond ring, which shone upon his little finger.

"My dear uncle," said Lord George, "I protest Miss Birmingham is quite your *belle*; you talk about her so often, and with such rapture too. Lady Norbury, I must alarm your jealousy afresh; my Lord is again at the old topic, the charms of Miss Birmingham."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake spare me!" said Lady

Norbury, with affected horror ; “ Am I to be for ever bored with that odious name of Birmingham ?”

“ Oh dear, no !” said Lord George, laughing. “ Not if Lord Norbury can help it : he wishes the fair heiress to lose it as soon as possible. What think you, should she change it for Mordaunt ?”

“ Or Fitzallan ?” said Lord Norbury, laughing. “ I’ll be even with you, George, for once.” Then filling his glass with claret, he raised his voice : “ Lady Norbury, you must join us in drinking Miss Birmingham’s health, and a good husband to her, and soon.”

“ Pray don’t speak quite so loud,” said the Countess, putting her hand to her forehead. “ Your voices really go through my poor head ; I am quite stunned with them.”

“ That poor head !” whispered Lord George to Louisa ; “ how conveniently it always aches !”

Soon after the ladies withdrew, and then, and

not till then, did Lord Norbury condescend to become agreeable. But he had an object in view; he wished to draw Lionel out, and for this purpose he adroitly turned the conversation on military affairs. Nor was he disappointed in the result. Colonel Montague was soon animated with the subject, and related various affairs, in which he had been particularly engaged, with much spirit, yet with perfect modesty. Some of his descriptions were so interesting, that in a little time all were listening to him; even Lord Mordaunt forgot to sneer, and Lord Dorville to gaze at his well-shaped nails. Dr. Sloper was obliged to remind the Archdeacon to pass the bottle; and the Abbé was so astonished at what he heard of the want of discipline shown by the French troops in a retreat, that he dropped his snuff-box as he muttered half aloud, "*incroyable !*" various times. Godfrey Mildmay listened to his friend with pleased attention, while Lord George's eyes glistened with rapture; and when-

ever Lionel was inclined to pass over some detail which would have reflected credit upon himself individually, his generous-hearted friend was sure to explain the thing as it had really happened. Nor did Colonel Montague's information appear to be confined to one subject. In the course of the conversation he displayed considerable insight into the characters of the inhabitants of the different countries he had visited: he had studied their languages, and was well acquainted with their literature.

Lord Norbury was really pleased with the young man. Such a *protégé* would do credit to his discernment; and his lordship's patronage would infallibly be of such advantage to him!

When the gentlemen joined the ladies in the saloon, Lord Norbury produced a large handsome work—the “Campaigns of the Duke of Wellington,” illustrated with very magnificent plates. Lionel had never seen this book, and he examined the engravings with much interest.

The ladies, especially the young ladies, were anxious to hear his remarks; the observations of a Waterloo hero must be so full of interest. He criticised the views. "I see plainly," said Lady Anne, "that Colonel Montague is an artist."

"An artist!" said Lord George, "yes, to be sure, he was the best draughtsman in our regiment, by far. Lionel, I say, where is the old scrap-book, my good fellow?"

"What, with the dirty brown back? I believe it is in my room, but really it is not fit to be produced."

"Say you so? Well, I think differently, and we shall soon see whether the company do not agree with me."

The old scrap-book, with its soiled cover, was sent for: and the Miss Carltons, had they dared, would have looked with disdain at its shabby appearance; but Lord George seized it with delight: "See," said he, "look at this old

Spanish beggar ; I remember drawing that a few hours before the Battle of the Pyrenees, and Lionel scolded me for having spoilt a fine outline he had made from the heights just above our position. Here is a plan of the battle he drew the day after, when that fool of an engineer—do you remember, Montague?—was emptying our last bottle of brandy. Here below is the direction to our lodgings when we were at Toulouse, the *Sieur Tarantes, Rue Verte*. And next leaf there is a caricature of some of the members of the *Cortes, en habits de cérémonie* : what quizzes ! are not they ? and written underneath, *Vivan Ustedes mil anos !* I recollect our Colonel, old Ball, calling out, ‘ Take ’em down on paper, Fitzallan : fine subjects, ’faith !, for a caricature.’ Oh, Lionel, the sight of this book quite rejoices my heart !”

It was a thick quarto volume, filled with brown paper leaves, on which all kinds of drawings were stuck ; some finished in water-colours, others slightly tinted : here was a neat pencil

sketch, and next to it a rough outline in chalk ; costumes of the different provinces in Spain filled one page, the following one presented a view near Brussels, while a third contained a bold sketch of some old building in Paris.

The drawings were in themselves interesting, but Lionel's observations, and the different anecdotes to which they gave rise, rendered them doubly so. As for Lord George, every stroke reminded him of some peril or danger they had run, which he would then relate in his best Irish manner. Louisa listened anxiously to his wonders: she had often heard Lionel relate these same adventures, but then he told a thing so simply that it lost half its effect. As Lord George was describing one of his most marvellous escapes "in th' imminent deadly breach," he caught her eye fixed upon him with the most intense interest: he looked at her stedfastly, and then burst into a fit of laughter. "'Faith," whispered he softly in her ear, "I can't go on

at this rate either, hang me if I can; but you'll perhaps just take in these two lines, like a kind soul as you are—

‘ She loved him for the dangers he had pass’d,
And he loved her that she did pity them.’ ”

Was Louisa surprised?—certainly.—Was she displeased?—perhaps not;—but she blushed.

Lady Anne was fortunately, at that moment, so interested in a sketch of Ciudad Rodrigo, which Lionel was explaining, that she neither saw nor heard any thing;—besides, he was trying to make her pronounce the letter *C* *à l’Espagnole*.”

“ Miss Louisa Mildmay can pronounce it perfectly,” said he. Lady Anne felt a twinge of jealousy.

“ Louisa, have you forgot your Spanish ?” said he.

The question came quite *à-propos* to relieve the young lady from the embarrassment she was beginning to feel in her *tête-à-tête* with Lord

George. The folding-doors into the Music-room were open, and, suddenly running to the piano-forte, and striking a few chords in a careless manner, she began that beautiful Spanish air—

“A la guerra, a la guerra, Espanoles !”

Colonel Montague forgot Ciudad Rodrigo, and the drawings, and the Spanish C, and more than all, the beautiful Lady Anne; he was in the Music-room, and close to the instrument, in a moment.

Lord George clapped, encored, and beat time.

“Well !” thought Lady Anne, “the girl must have love-powder about her; for both these men seem at her feet.”

When Louisa had finished the Spanish air, Lord George entreated that she would fetch her guitar; but, as Lady Anne did not second the proposition, Louisa judged it most prudent to entreat her ladyship to favour them with an air.

But Lady Anne knew better than to venture to show off her voice after Louisa's ; so she struck up a lively waltz. " Oh, my dear Coz," said Lord George, " now do be good-natured, and play one of those *mazouretas* I gave you : it was Lionel brought them over from Dresden ; he and Miss Mildmay shall show the step, for they both learnt it of a certain Count Czartoriski at Paris. Don't you remember, Miss Louisa, one night at Madame de Wallestein's ?"

" To be sure I do," said Louisa, and she and Lionel exhibited the true Polish waltz step to admiration. Lady Anne felt more and more vexed, as she was obliged to play on. Lord George kept applauding the dancers, and then wanted to try the step himself. Lady Margaret Carlton, hearing the sound of the piano, came from the saloon to see what the young people were all about, and to enquire if her daughters had not some more music with them, which might be new to Lady Anne—something of Beethoven's

or Kalkbrenner's, one of their last duetts. Lady Anne, however, took a sudden fright at the word duett; so, starting from the instrument, she vowed there should be no more music that evening—they must have a round game. Would any body play at *Robert le diable*? Lord George would teach them all this new and fashionable French game. *Robert le diable* succeeded à merveille; this famous round game was so noisy, that the party at the whist-table in the saloon were quite disturbed by the continued bursts of laughter. The Abbé and Miss Bevil could hardly get through their game of chess. After *Robert le diable*, they ventured on *la Peur*, a most intricate game; and then the party were almost tired. A pause ensued; Lady Anne had got back to Spain again. She was criticizing Southey's Don Roderic with Colonel Montague; from thence they had just got to the Peninsular war, when that eternal marplot Lord George called out, “ Oh, let's leave Spain now,

Lady Anne, and take a lesson in *écarté* from Lionel: he and Miss Mildmay used to play constantly together at Paris:—here are the cards: will you play, Louisa?"

"*Oh, je ne demande pas mieux !*" said she.

"I dare say not," thought Lady Anne. "One would think that Irish cousin of mine was born to plague me. Some of the counters fell under the table; Lord George stooped for them. Louisa held the candle to light him, and he whispered to her, 'And so Lionel will say, '*Je propose,*' to you.' She answered by a blush. Lady Anne supposed that it was stooping which had heightened her colour so. At length Colonel Montague and Miss Mildmay began their game. "I shall bet on you, Miss Louisa," said Lord George. "Now, *combien proposez vous ?* —I love *écarté*," continued he: "it reminds me of our little sociable *soirées* in the Rue Royale. Do you remember the dandy Frenchman who used to stand behind your chair, when you

played? and who always would have it that *Monsieur le Colonel Montaigne* was *aux pieds de Mademoiselle Louise*?"

"Nonsense!" said Louisa, angrily.

"And then, for fun, the Baron de Wallestein told *Monsieur le Chevalier* that Lionel was the *galant de Madame la Baronne*; and then, when he discovered the truth, he made a low bow, assumed a look of despair, and said, with his hand on his heart, '*Qu' il ne nuiroit pas aux intérêts de Mademoiselle.*' Now, do you remember that?"

"How very ridiculous you are!" said Louisa.

Lady Anne listened to it all as she took her lesson in *écarté*. Miss Bevil kindly looked in to see if they played the game quite right; and when she returned to the saloon, she said, "Really, this Colonel Montague is a very delightful young man; so full of agreeable talents! I think I shall produce him at one of my diplomatic *soirées*; he would take with *my set*: my people are just of a sort to appreciate his *petits*

riens. I dare say he would be clever at *bouts rimés*; or he would do at *écarté* with old Baron Gloyau, which would keep his excellency awake."

"'Faith! a good hit enough, that idea of your's," said Lord Dorville; "wish to goodness you would find something to keep me awake."

"*You*," said Miss Bevil, looking at him from head to foot: "Oh, you're much past my power, my lord."

"Lord Dorville awake, I protest!" said Lady Anne, putting her head into the saloon: "we all wondered what had become of him!"

"Oh, you have not wanted me, Lady Anne," said his lordship, with a look of reproach at her. "You have been playing *écarté*, and I have been *écarté'd*; so there is only a D—a cruel D—between us."

"Well, that's not bad," said Mrs. Metcalf; "remove that cruel D, my lord, and Lady Anne will be D—lighted."

"Lord Dorville D—tected in two *bon-mots*

in one sentence !” said Lady Anne, with perfect *sang-froid* ; “ your lordship must have had pleasant dreams, I think.”

“ I wish, then, that I were dreaming still, or that you would not all go away and leave me alone on this soft sofa. Do stay, Lady Anne, there’s room for you ;” and his lordship actually moved to the other end, and finished a yawn as quickly as he conveniently could.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FLIRTATION.

“ But like our heroes, much more brave than wise,
She conquers for the triumph—not the prize.”

YOUNG'S SATIRES.

“ WELL !” thought Lady Anne to herself that night, when she retired to her room, “ I should like to know what this said Colonel Montague means. Is he in love with Louisa Mildmay ? or has he a heart quite at liberty for any body ? or ‘ rather, I would say, for me, should I think it worth while to set at him ? And then, again, what do I mean myself ? Sup-

pose he is in love with her, what is it to me? Nothing, to be sure! only I should like better that he should be at my feet." And her ladyship immediately determined to try all her powers upon the devoted Lionel. "It will be good practice," thought she; "and it will be sure, at least, to make Lord Dorville jealous, if he really has any love for me." The fair coquette fell asleep, dreaming of triumphs yet to come. Poor Louisa little thought of the projects which were forming against her; and could Lady Anne have seen into her heart, she would have been surprised to find the real state of her friend's feelings. Lord George's decided attentions had made the gay Louisa the happiest of human beings. "All those speeches must mean something," said she to herself. "Why, once it was really a complete declaration; but then he is such a rattle! Oh! how I wish I knew what he really meant!" Should she write and tell Julia? No! it would perhaps

be wiser to wait till he said something more decisive. "But, at least, he likes me," thought she with infinite delight; "and after all, *viola l'essentiel, le reste viendra avec le temps*. Oh! how happy it will make Caroline to hear of his preference! Such a delightful creature as he is; so handsome, so agreeable, so amiable, so much attached to Lionel!" There was no end of Lord George's perfections, and she dreamt of him all night, and woke in the morning in the same happy frame of mind. She was indeed in that enviable state when every thing appeared *couleur de rose*.

The next morning, before the breakfast-bell rang, Lionel and Godfrey were taking a stroll round the pleasure-ground.

"I think," said the former, "that my friend Lord George does not dislike your sister Louisa, Godfrey, if I may judge by what passed yesterday evening. *Qu'en dites vous?*"

"Oh, I think there were evident marks of

a decided flirtation; perhaps only a renewal of one. He is an old friend of Louisa's; I believe she used to meet him often at Madame de Wallestein's."

"Oh, constantly," said Lionel; "and I can answer how much he always admired her.—Whether his finances will admit of his marrying is another point; for his father, the old Marquis of Allandale, is far from rich."

"And then that strange Lord Killarney, his brother, has been very extravagant, has he not?"

"Oh, to a degree; he is a man of whom I have the very worst opinion; for I always think that some of my poor brother Edmund's foibles may be attributed to him: he lived much with him at Vienna, when first he went abroad; and I understand that, at Naples, they have been always together. Lord Killarney is, I believe, not on terms with his father; and I have also understood that the old Lord doats on Lord George; but the estate is strictly en-

tailed, so that he will not be able to settle any thing on him. And then poor George is not the most prudent of human beings. Do you think it would be well to advise Louisa of this,—to tell her the state of the case, for fear she should get entangled.”

“No, no!” said Godfrey, “leave her to herself; he may not mean any thing, and interference with a girl of Louisa’s turn does more harm than good.”

“But she will be sure to meet him constantly at Caroline’s; for Wallestein is very fond of him.”

“Well, then, let her take care of herself; I am not afraid. Louisa knows what she is about, as well as most people. But, now that we have got on *les affaires du cœur*, pray, Mr. Lionel, what did you do with the fair Barbara the other night?”

“What could I do, but fall desperately in love with her?” said Lionel.

“ Oh ! that is no news, thank you : I never saw two people more thoroughly smitten, as they call it, than both of you ; and let me tell you, whoever wins that girl will get a treasure. Only my heart is made of such tough materials, or I should have been in love with her myself long ago. If Barbara could dispose of herself, you would not have to ask twice ; but you will have something to do with the father and mother before you can carry off the prize. Keep your own secret by all means, my good fellow, for you are among the Philistines here ; and, if the Duke of Clanalpin were to hear of it, there is no telling what might happen,” said Godfrey, laughing ; “ besides, the Earl here will cut your throat for poaching on what he intends for his own manor.”

“ What ! does Lord Mordaunt admire Barbara, then ?”

“ Oh no ! he has no eyes but for the handsome Mrs. Sydenham, who comes here to-day.

or to-morrow ; but perhaps he may mean to marry the heiress. Now do you take ? With your grandees, marriage and love are different things."

" Scoundrel !" said Montague, indignantly.

" Oh, come ! none of your heroics, my Chevalier *sans peur et sans reproche*, as Lady Anne calls you : we must take the world as we find it. By the by, her ladyship's eyes often wander your way, Lionel. You must take care of yourself and your heart ; for I have heard Lady Anne say that any woman may win any man, if she will take the trouble ; but, you know, fore-warned is fore-armed. Besides, the young lady is rather too general in her tastes ; her's is regard paid to the sex. Ah ! there is the gong, the summons to breakfast ; we must be going."

When they entered the room, all were assembled : Lionel was going to place himself next Lord Norbury, but Lady Anne called out,

"Oh, Colonel Montague, I select you for my knight : come and help me to do the honours of the brown loaf. George, move lower down ; I hate a cousin next me, it is almost as bad as a brother."

"Not quite, I hope," said Lord George ; "however, I am satisfied : I shall be next Miss Louisa, and I dare say she remembers a little French song with a *refrain*, *Ce n'est qu'un cousin*, which tells a different story."

"Well, I declare," said Lady Margaret, "I think the change a good one. If Colonel Montague had been next to Lord Norbury, it would have been dreadful : that is a thing the Duke of Clanalpin is so particular about, the people being rightly placed. His grace, I know, once thought of having the names put upon the chairs. Charlotte Augusta, I am sure you are a gainer ; so much better to have Mr. Godfrey Mildmay next you than your sister Apollonia."

“ Oh dear, yes ! mamma,” lisped out Miss Charlotte Augusta.

Godfrey little thought that the young lady had received a lecture that morning from her mamma, for not treating him with more attention. “ True, Mr. Godfrey Mildmay was not a smart man, but Bishop’s-Court was a pretty place, besides a very respectable old family, and good sort of people : then the young man was in the law, and, as the Duke of Clanalpin always said, no telling how those fellows get on.” And so Lady Margaret Carlton brought herself to think without horror of settling one of the nine Miss Carltons at Bishop’s-Court ; *faute de mieux*, it really might answer.

Godfrey, in happy ignorance of this plot against his heart, chattered away to his fair neighbour, too humble to think himself a mark for her ladyship’s machinations.

Lady Norbury was quite in low spirits ; the

weather did not suit her, just because every body else was raving about the beauty of the day. Some people might admire that sort of grey morning, but she could not say she did; without sun she always felt it damp. No one contradicted her, so she was forced to find some fresh subject of complaint. The tea was not good. Miss Molyneux was immediately so properly sorry, it was all her fault; she had not let it stand long enough. No! it was the water. Lady Norbury was so sure the water had not boiled properly. "Indeed, Fudge," said her ladyship, addressing the groom of the chambers, "you should take care to make the water boil!"

"Do bring me my shawl," said Lady Norbury, shivering, "and see whether the conservatory door is shut, for I feel such a draught of air come to my back. Why don't the other things come? there's nothing to eat on the table, that I can see."

“ No, indeed,” said Lord George, laughing, “ nothing at all ; only long-rolls, and short-rolls, and round-rolls, and twists, and French bread, and Yorkshire bread, and Waterloo cakes, and sudden deaths, and Sally Lunn’s. Why, God bless you, my dear aunt ! you must think us all in a bread fever, if what is on the table goes for nothing.”

“ They certainly must have a regular baker,” thought Lady Margaret ; “ the Duke of Clan-alpin always said it was the only way to have good bread at all times.”

“ Is this what you call a fine hunting-morning, Mr. Archdeacon ?” said Lady Norbury, crossing her shawl.

“ Oh, a capital day for scent, my lady ! I wish we may be as fortunate to-morrow,” said the doctor, with his mouth quite full of perigord pie.

“ True, true,” said Lord Norbury, “ I quite forgot to-morrow. Why it is to be the last day

this season : Mordaunt, reach me the hunting-card from the chimney-piece. ‘ The Merton fox-hounds will throw off to-morrow morning, Wednesday, March 24, at Embley-rings, at 10 o’clock precisely.’ Well, I dare say it will be a very full field ! Gentlemen, I hope you all mean to go. Mr. Godfrey, Colonel Montague, I shall be happy to mount you ; I suppose, Mordaunt, you will ride Dumbiedikes : Black Jack and Truepenny will be at the gentlemen’s service. And you, Lord George, how shall you manage ?”

“ Oh ! the gray, my lord, is quite sound again. And I suppose Dr. Sloper will take Lightfoot ? *Et pour vous, Monsieur l’Abbé, votre jolie jument gris pommelée.*”

“ *Ah ! oui, milor, cette chère petite bête ! je l’ai nommée la Duchesse de Berri.*”

“ Faith ! now that is good. Well, I hope the *Duchesse* will carry you safe, and that she’ll prove sound. Think of Monsieur l’Abbé set-

ting up for a judge of horse-flesh, and dealing with that Yorkshire jockey, Barney Brown!" said Lord George to Lionel.

"I hope the ladies will all drive over to cover," said Lord Norbury; "it is such a gay rendezvous. I dare say we shall have all the neighbourhood to-morrow."

"Mrs. Sydenham and her daughter, of course," said Lady Margaret, with a sneer; "so many beaux must attract."

"Oh, fie!" said Lord Norbury, "it is the ladies attract us men."

"And then there will be the Lady Beaulieus, the Derwents and Glenmores, I should think," said Lady Anne; "Lady Glenmore told me she liked it better than any thing, so much fun and gossip! all the news is always heard at cover."

"Unluckily," said Lady Margaret, "I made an appointment for three of my girls at the dentist's at H——; and then the Archdeacon must send his horses for my second son Ferdi-

nand, who is coming home from a private tutor's; so we cannot go. Large families, as the Duke of Clanalpin says, are a never failing trouble." Who could contradict such an assertion? So presently Lady Margaret added, "But I wonder your ladyship never drives over to cover," addressing Lady Norbury; "I can assure you it is often very gay."

"I am not so fond of a cold March wind," said the Countess; "I would not drive over to Embley-rings to see all the dogs in Europe, in such weather as this; why, it would be the death of me."

"But you forget, my dear Mamma," said Lady Anne, "that there would be other things besides dogs—those things called gentlemen; and sometimes ladies like to see them, and hear them too."

All the young ladies laughed.

"I really do not see why we girls should not

make a party in the barouche; Mrs. Metcalf would *chaperon* us, I dare say."

"Oh, that I will, with the greatest pleasure: I have been a great huntress in my time," said the gay old lady. "When I was quite young, I remember a famous song, which made a great noise in this country. The chorus was,

'The hounds of old Merton for me!'

Miss Bevil all this time was talking and thinking of the St. Hubert in France; and all the gay rendezvous *de chasse* she had attended in the neighbourhood of Paris. She hummed the air *du premier pas*, greatly to the delight of her neighbour, the complaisant Abbé.

"But what shall we do all this morning?" said Lady Anne. "Colonel Montague, you were saying yesterday you had forgotten all about Embley-rings. It is a favourite ride of mine. Shall we go and explore about the old Roman fortifications? What say you, Louisa?"

The young lady was ready for any thing.

“Suppose, then, we order the horses. The black charger will carry Colonel Montague, if he will honour us with his company: and then, Louisa, will you condescend to ride mamma's little Welsh pony, Taffey?”

“Oh, with all my heart!” said Louisa, “and Lionel will be delighted to attend us.”

“And so should I,” said Lord George, “but I must go and look after my sergeant at Merton; however, some day, Miss Louisa, I hope you will mount my pretty long-tail, it would carry you nicely.”

“Well, then,” said Lady Anne, “I believe we are all agreed. Mr. Godfrey Mildmay says he has some law business at Monks Weldon, and Mordaunt has letters to write. Lady Margaret and the Miss Carltons, I am sorry to say, leave us this morning; and the Misses Molyneux never ride. What shall you do, mamma?”

Lady Norbury could not exactly determine:

perhaps she might think it too cold to leave the fire-side ; perhaps she might take a drive in the barouche, if the sun got out. She wanted to call on old Mrs. Radcliffe, at Abbey Lees : or she did not know if she should not ask one of the Misses Molyneux to drive her out in a new pony-carriage she had just got. Perhaps Miss Molyneux would finish the hand-screens she was painting for her ladyship ; and Miss Maria, she should trouble to read her a letter she had just received from her niece, Lady Hauton. " Pray, Anne," continued her ladyship, after all these perhappes, and in the same drawling, sleepy tone : " when you write to Georgiana, do tell her not to cross her letters."

" Yes, mamma. I was just thinking, that in all our arrangements we had forgotten Lord Dorville : very extraordinary ! where is he ? Oh, I see him reading the newspaper in the next room. Pray, my lord, what are you going to do this morning ?"

“’Pon my soul ! I neither know nor care ;— looks devilish like rain—monstrous heavy clouds, and a due south-west. Probably I shall play at chess with the Abbé, or have a game at billiards with Dr. Sloper, or take a good gallop on Horsely-common. Why does your ladyship enquire ?”

“Oh ! I thought, as it is so fine, that you might like to ride with Miss Louisa Mildmay and me ; but, as you are so particularly engaged, my lord—”

“No, I am not engaged at all : I am free as air,” and he looked in an odd way at Lady Anne, so as to catch her eye. “Thank God, I am free to do any thing. Is any body else to be of the party ?”

“Only Colonel Montague.”

“Oh, then I am sure you do not want me at all. I hope your ladyship will have a very agreeable ride ;” and he made her a low bow.

“On his high horse, I protest ; turned sulky,”

thought Lady Anne; "but it does not signify, I shall soon win him back, when I please." Her ladyship was in high spirits. "How shall I manage with my other beau, I wonder?—I should like to have had him all to myself. Well, we shall see."

Just then a note was brought to Lady Anne; it was from Mrs. Sydenham,—an answer to her's of the day before; it was as follows:—

"A thousand thanks to dear Lady Anne for her most obliging note and agreeable proposal, which it is quite impossible to refuse. Independent of the pleasure we shall enjoy in such agreeable society as that of our friends at Norbury, it is always infinitely more to my taste to stay all night; and I can answer that dear Laura and Mr. Sydenham agree with me, for, to be sure, returning ten long miles—

'With the coachman in liquor, and moon in a fog,
And no thought in one's head but a ditch or a bog,'

is a bad business. Mr. Sydenham is looking forward most anxiously for a fine day to-morrow; he expects a very full field. We dine and stay all night at Glenmore Place, and he goes from thence to Embley-rings; and we hope to persuade dear little Lady Glenmore to go with us to cover: but her situation, I believe, is now no secret, and the old lord is so anxious, and so happy, that we must be careful what we propose. She is a sweet creature, quite kindly partial to dear Laura already. How I am running on, and I have a favour to request. Sir Harcourt Beresford is staying with us, a young *protégé* of mine: we became very intimate with him at Naples. May I bring him to Norbury? Will you, my dear young friend, apologize to Lady Norbury for my taking this liberty? Sir Harcourt sings sweetly; he and Laura are practising some enchanting duetts together. Pray thank Lord Mordaunt for his so kindly remembering about the peacocks. His Japan

is a beauty, and goes by the donor's name. You may suppose he is a favourite.

"Say a thousand kind things from us all to dear Lady Norbury and your charming circle.

"Ever dear Lady Anne's obliged and faithful

"ADELAIDE SYDENHAM.

"*Elsinore Lodge, Tuesday.*"

"Postscript. We depend on my old friend and favourite, Mrs. Metcalf, returning with us to-morrow. So, a certain rich lady has left the Abbey for London! Birmingham wares do require fresh gilding. How *my* Barbara will be *pronéd* in her set. Laura, with one of her saucy looks over my shoulder, asks what set is that? Once more, adieu, dearest Lady Anne."

"There," said Lady Anne, tossing the note to Louisa, "there is *eau sucrée* for you! pray read it through."

“The acid is all at the bottom, in the post-script,” replied Louisa, when she returned it.

“Mamma! won’t you read Mrs. Sydenham’s note?”

“Oh no! can’t you tell me what it’s about? She always writes with such pale ink, and her paper smells so of musk. I suppose they come to-morrow?”

“Yes, and she begs to bring a Sir Harcourt Beresford, an interesting, musical young man. Am I to say you will be glad to see him?”

“Oh, of course; but pray who may Sir Harcourt Beresford be? Do you know, Mrs. Metcalf?”

“Oh, he is one of the Beresfords of King’s-County,” said the old lady; “grandson to my old friend Sir Marcus, who succeeded his brother Sir Lucius, who was shot in a duel with Governor Blake, some thirty years ago: his mother was one of the handsome Miss Girdlestones, of Berkshire. Fine property near New-

bury came into the family through that marriage. Another Miss Girdlestone married one of the Thistlethwaites of Yorkshire."

"Oh! spare me the rest of the pedigree, my dear Mrs. Metcalf; I know quite enough now."

"I wonder your ladyship never heard of Sir Harcourt Beresford," said Lady Margaret: "we, who live close to Mrs. Sydenham, hear of nothing else: he either is, or she wishes him to be, an admirer of Miss Sydenham's."

"I think," said Miss Charlotte Augusta, "he used to ride with her in Hyde Park last year."

"And was not he the man," said Miss Carlton, "who picked up Miss Sydenham when she fell close to the Serpentine River,—a tall, black, handsome man upon a little white horse?"

"No, my dear Apollonia," replied the mother; "if you remember, the Duke of Clanalpin said he was a little white man upon a tall black horse."

Most of the party smiled at this mistake. Lady Margaret was provoked at the smile, and vexed that she could not stay at Norbury to make her remarks and discoveries upon Sir Harcourt Beresford and Miss Sydenham. She soon added, "So, Lady Glenmore is in high favour just now at Elsinore Lodge. Well, so much the better ; for at first, just after the wedding, Mrs. Sydenham could not conceal her vexation ; she always meant to place Laura at the Castle. And now, as Mrs. Metcalf has left the room, for I know what friends they are, I suppose one may say that the manner in which she courts Lord Beaulieu, is really too barefaced."

"But he has a wife," said Lady Anne.

"Ah, poor thing ! but she is dying abroad ; the last accounts were very bad. Then one knows all the suspicions about his having a mistress in town. He does neglect those poor

girls sadly. However, they cannot bear either Mr. or Miss Sydenham, that I know."

"How ill-natured the world is!" said Lady Norbury, angrily; "Lord Beaulieu have a mistress indeed! the most unlikely thing in the world. Poor man! he is too much to be pitied." And her ladyship seemed quite affected.

Lady Margaret for once was silenced; and soon after the Archdeacon's carriage was announced. All the trunks, seats, hat-boxes, and cap-boxes were properly placed, and in due time the three ladies made their appearance, ready equipped for their journey. The whole Norbury party attended them to the front door, with the politest attention; nay, even Lady Norbury herself remained under the portico, exposed to the cold March wind, till they had driven through the first gate; till the old family coach could only just be discerned creeping

slowly up the steep ascent which led to the grand entrance lodge.

The spell was then broken, and every body gave tongue in an instant. "Joy go with them all!" said Lady Anne, "and long may it be ere we see them here again!"

"Oh! that voice of Lady Margaret Carlton's," said Lady Norbury, "runs through my poor head; she does talk so: all the Clanalpines are great talkers, and have horrid voices."

"She is a surprising looking woman," said Miss Molyneux, in her sentimental tone; "such fine teeth and eyes!"

"You may have as fine if you choose, my dear," said Miss Bevil: "such things may be bought, you know."

"La! now you don't say so? Poor innocent me! never thought of such a thing!"

"So ill-natured her ladyship was," said Mrs. Metcalf, "about the Sydenhams; I was in the next room, and heard all she said about Lord

Glenmore:—fancy the grapes were sour, and that Lady Margaret meant him for one of her daughters all the time.”

The ladies now separated to their different morning's employments. Lady Anne went to answer Mrs. Sydenham's note, and then to put on her habit. As she passed through the hall, she saw Colonel Montague and Louisa standing together, admiring the fine view from the portico.

“As usual,” thought Lady Anne, “he must be by her side, he must like her. I wish I could prevent her riding with us; let me see, a plan has just struck me; I think it will do.” So after changing her dress, her ladyship flew to the stable-yard, to have some talk with the head-groom. She settled it all, and returned to the house. The sound of Louisa's guitar met her ear; she and Lionel were alone in the music-room. He seemed to be looking over her music; his head was bent down, but she heard him say,

“ Well, I hope you will find it pleasant in Portland-place ; I am sure Caroline is so much obliged to you for going to her.”

“ Ah, *pardonnez moi !*” said Louisa, with one of her gayest smiles, and with one of those arch looks which Lady Anne thought made her irresistible. “ ’Tis I that am obliged ; I shall be so happy ; it will bring dear Paris back to my mind in full force.”

“ Ah, Louisa !” said Lionel, shaking his head ; why this constant hankering after Paris ? Surely you might make yourself happy in your own country : you have not, like Caroline, foreign ties.”

“ Oh, oh !” thought Lady Anne : he is jealous of some Parisian admirer : ‘ the course of true love, then, does not run clear.’ Well, I am glad I know that, however ; I think I need hear no more.” So she entered the room, making as much noise as she could with her whip. “ Lady Anne ready, I protest !” exclaimed Louisa ;

“and here have I been all this time flirting with you, Mr. Lionel!”

“That speech,” thought Lady Anne, “may be meant as a blind to me; she is quite deep enough for that”

“I’ll be ready in a moment,” cried Louisa, as she locked up the guitar; then looking slyly at him, she said, in a whisper, “I wish Barbara Birmingham was here to take you off my hands, Lionel; I should not then waste my time so much.”

The horses appeared at the door, as Louisa entered *en Amazone*.

“But where is the pony?” said Louisa; “my old friend Taffey? I do not see him, Lady Anne.”

“Oh, my dear! I forgot to tell you, Papa had made such a mistake, or rather the coachman!—that is, Papa forgot to say it would be wanted, and so the coachman let the boy, who is gone with a letter, take it. Monstrous stupid!

—but Mamma hardly ever uses it, and so they are glad to give poor old Taffey a little exercise sometimes. This is Mordaunt's chesnut mare, which I ride sometimes: it will carry you very safely. Is not she a beauty?"

"Yes, very handsome, my dear lady Anne; but far beyond my powers, I fear. I am such a coward, you know."

The party were soon mounted, but, before they were through the first gate, Louisa's fears were justified. The beautiful chesnut mare kicked and plunged, and showed evident signs of being not a little frisky. The fair equestrian was too happy to be dismounted; and Lady Anne, reading in her countenance how frightened she was, urged her in vain to remount. She made a sort of faint offer to change horses with her; but Louisa was quite as much afraid of Lady Anne's tall, spirited black horse, as of the thorough-blood chesnut mare, and, though the groom assured her they were both as quiet as two lambs, and only a little frolicksome,

may-be, at first starting, Louisa declared herself perfectly satisfied that she was too decided a coward to mount either. "I will go and practise the mazouretas on the piano-forte for this evening," said she; "and then I can drive out, or walk with Lady Norbury. So do not let me detain you, dear Lady Anne; you will have a charming ride;—Lionel, you will find her such a spirited horsewoman!"

"Well! then, if we must part," said Lady Anne, with affected regret, "good-b'ye, my love; I am quite sorry you should lose your ride this sweet morning;" and her ladyship set off at a brisk pace, triumphant at the success of her stratagem (for it was her ladyship's own private order to send Taffey out of the way on some errand), and enlivened by the idea of a *tête-à-tête* ride with a man whom she wanted to captivate, merely because she believed him to be attached to another.

Notwithstanding all that Lady Norbury had said of the cold March wind, the day was hea-

venly; one of those spring days which are now and then felt, even in our climate. There was no sun, but the air was so mild, and the western breeze so soft, that his presence, all-cheering as it always must be, was hardly wanted. The pretty rural lanes round Norbury were particularly pleasant, and Lady Anne exerted all her powers for the advantage of her companion. She so far saw into his character, that she felt convinced that brilliancy and wit were not what charmed him. She therefore tried literature and taste, and not without effect, for Lionel found her conversation very agreeable: it was not talent, but heart and genuine feeling, that she wanted, and these deficiencies could not possibly be discovered on so short an acquaintance. Lady Anne possessed an eye for the picturesque, and "she did the honours to art and nature," with infinite eloquence. "Let me but find out what he likes," thought she, "and I will seem that very thing."

She turned the conversation on the Wallesteins. Was the Baroness handsome? Lionel described her; Lady Anne was enchanted with the portrait, dying to know her, hoped she should soon be intimate, did not wonder at Louisa's strong partiality for so delightful a person:—a sweet girl Louisa was; Colonel Montague must think so. He did in very truth, and he said it; but so calmly that Lady Anne was hardly satisfied; "Very cautious," thought she; "afraid of committing himself; probably some difficulties in the way." He spoke most handsomely of Miss Mildmay; she was a very superior character, an excellent creature.

"Quite at ease here," thought Lady Anne; "no danger in saying all he thinks of her."

They were now crossing over a pretty wild bit of common, whose natural beauties had interceded in their favour against some inclosure bill. They came to a retired narrow lane, leading through a sort of dingle. Lady Anne proposed

exploring it ; it was a path with which even *she* was unacquainted. They had not proceeded far, amid brush-wood and hazel-bushes, before they came to a gate, which they found tied ; but from a hovel adjoining to it issued forth a tribe of little ragged children, who eagerly disputed which should have the honour of opening the gate. The pallid looks of the one who succeeded, struck Lady Anne as she passed through ; and she asked, in her sweetest tone, if he were ill. The child said he was only just recovered from a fever, of which his poor father was then dying, and that mammy was quite heart-broken ; and at this part of his tale he burst into tears. Lady Anne's humanity was instantly moved ; and she proposed to Lionel to dismount, that they might see these unfortunate people. On entering the cottage, they beheld a wretched being extended on a miserable pallet : his sufferings, fortunately for himself, appeared to be drawing to a close. The unhappy

wife was endeavouring, with one hand, to hold some liquid to the lips of the dying man, and with the other, to support a miserable-looking infant ; who was trying in vain to find some nourishment at its mother's breast.

On being questioned as to the nature of her husband's illness, the tale the poor woman told was an every-day story of poverty and disease. The sick man was a labourer, who had caught a violent cold during the winter, which had settled on his lungs: he had exerted himself beyond his strength, to keep up while his wife lay in of her ninth child. During her confinement, the eldest was taken ill of a low fever: he had recovered, but his poor father had caught the disorder from him, and that was his present complaint.

“ Had they had no advice ? ”

“ Yes, the parish doctor, who had attended the poor woman during her lying-in, had prescribed for the husband ; but he had left off coming

because he said it was of no use, nothing could be done." Lady Anne feared that it was, alas ! but too true ; but she emptied the contents of her purse into the poor woman's hand, and Lionel liberally contributed his share : they also promised to ride to the apothecary who attended the family at Norbury, and send him to the cottage immediately.

The poor woman was quite overcome with surprise and gratitude ; she repeatedly prayed that God above might bless them ! sure it was He who had sent them to her relief, just when she thought that herself and all her babes must have perished for want ; for as to what the parish gave, it hardly could keep them alive. " Indeed," added the poor creature, " it was but yesternight that I was wishing I had been near that angel Miss Birmingham, who relieves all that are in distress : I am sure she would help me. But it is a sad weary way to Atherford Abbey, and I durst not have sent

any of the children, for fear they might miss the road."

"Do you know Miss Birmingham then?" enquired Colonel Montague.

"Ah, sir! all that are sick and afflicted in these parts know that good young lady; I mean if they are of her parish, or in any ways belonging to her. Before last winter we lived in the village of Atherford, and many a time has she brought us both clothes and food, and given my husband work when labour was scarce; and none knows of her charities but those who receive them. But the Lord will reward her, as he will you too, my good young lady and gentleman."

Lady Anne and her companion departed, her ladyship reflecting with much complacency on the benevolent feelings she had shown, and the pleasing light in which she must have appeared to Colonel Montague; he not in the least thinking about her, but ~~his~~ mind full of

what he had heard of Miss Birmingham—just what he should have expected of her, from the amiable idea he had formed of her character. She was one of those “who do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.”

Once fairly on the great road again, they proceeded at a brisk pace towards Embley-rings, a hill rising just above the famous fox-cover, which was to be the rendezvous the next day for the Merton hounds.

They halted their horses a little before they reached the very summit, to give them breathing; and to gaze at the magnificent view which opened to the eye on every side. It was, indeed, a perfect panorama; and Lady Anne was happy in having to explain to Colonel Montague the different beauties which claimed their attention. An immense range of distant gray hills could be faintly perceived in the horizon, and a spot was pointed out as the site of the distant cathedral of H——: with a glass

the town could be distinctly seen. The town of Merton lay just below them in the hollow; and the splendid pile of buildings at Norbury looked quite insignificant, lost amid a multitude of more important objects. The spire of Weldon Regis church could be distinctly seen, and a large plantation of firs just above Atherford Abbey. The river Ather was beautifully meandering through the plain; the woods to the right, as far as the eye could see, were near Glenmore Place; and a tower on the other side, Lady Anne said, was an ornamental building in the grounds of Derwent Vale:—this led to anecdotes of the two noble owners of those fine seats. They then proceeded to the top of the hill, where the remains of a Roman camp presented an object of great curiosity. This spot was properly Embley-rings, though, in the lapse of time, it had become the designation of all that line of hilly country.

The grand circle, or ring of the fortifications,

could still be distinctly traced. Lionel was much interested with these curious remains of that wonderful people, whose greatness may be in some measure appreciated by the extraordinary magnificence of those works which have survived to our days. He dismounted, that he might examine every part, and Lady Anne was much amused with his antiquarian enthusiasm. She rallied him all the way home upon his passion for the Romans.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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